

UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

THE JAPANESE NEW RELIGION OOMOTO:  
RECONCILIATION OF NATIVIST AND  
INTERNATIONALIST TRENDS

THESIS

SUBMITTED AS PARTIAL REQUIREMENT  
FOR THE MASTERS OF ARTS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

LA NOUVELLE RELIGION JAPONAISE OOMOTO:  
RÉCONCILIATION DES COURANTS  
NATIVISTES ET INTERNATIONALISTES

MÉMOIRE

PRÉSENTÉE COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE  
DE LA MAÎTRISE EN SCIENCES DES RELIGIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Founded in 1892 following its founder's divine revelations, the Japanese new religion Oomoto is a relatively small sect based largely on Shinto and firmly rooted in traditional Japanese culture. Nevertheless, Oomoto also comprises strongly internationalist, and, to a certain extent, universalist aspects.

From a Western perspective, Oomoto's "nativist" or "nationalist" aspects – notably its Shinto ritual practice, the sacred character attributed to the Japanese language, the value placed on traditional Japanese culture, the non-encouragement of conversion of non-Japanese people to Oomoto, and a central role for Japan and the Japanese people in the divine plan – would seem to be in tension with Oomoto's "internationalist" aspects – notably the promotion of Esperanto as an international language and the promotion of interfaith activity (based on the doctrine of *bankyo-dokon*, which teaches that all religions share the same divine source).

This thesis examines the relationships among Oomoto's nativist and internationalist aspects, how they are perceived by certain members of the Oomoto organization, and how they are reconciled or explained in the context of this religion. The following hypothesis is proposed: the duality between the internationalist and nativist tendencies in Oomoto is not a true tension, but rather a duality belonging to Oomoto's dualistic doctrine "Izu-Mizu". This research is built on a field study conducted in the fall of 2013 at Oomoto's main center in Kameoka, Japan. This study, centered on interviews with employees, leaders and volunteers of the Oomoto organization and accompanied by archival research and participant observation, sets out to better understand the relationships between Oomoto's nativist and internationalist aspects and test the hypothesis outlined above.

The researcher concludes that the proposed hypothesis is not supported by the evidence: Oomoto's nativist and internationalist aspects do not constitute a duality in the sense of the doctrine of Izu-Mizu. The results suggest rather that the nativist elements are perceived as non-essential aspects, while Oomoto's essence is perceived as being universalist.

**KEY WORDS :** Oomoto, Esperanto, Deguchi Onisaburo, Deguchi Nao, nouvelle religion japonaise, Japanese new religion

## RÉSUMÉ

Fondée en 1892 suite aux révélations divines de sa fondatrice, la nouvelle religion japonaise Oomoto est une secte relativement petite fondée en grande partie sur le Shintoïsme et fermement ancrée dans la culture traditionnelle japonaise. Cependant, Oomoto comporte aussi des aspects fortement internationalistes, même, à certains égards, universalistes.

D'un point de vue occidental, les aspects « nativistes » ou « nationalistes » d'Oomoto – notamment une pratique rituelle shintoïste, le caractère sacré de la langue japonaise, la mise en valeur de la culture traditionnelle japonaise, le non-encouragement de l'adhésion de personnes non-japonaises à Oomoto, et un rôle central pour le Japon et le peuple japonais dans le plan divin – sembleraient être en tension avec les aspects « internationalistes » d'Oomoto – notamment la promotion de l'Espéranto comme langue internationale et la promotion de l'activité interreligieuse (basée sur la doctrine de *bankyo-dokon*, qui enseigne que toutes les religions partagent la même source divine).

Ce mémoire examine les rapports entre ces aspects nativistes et internationalistes d'Oomoto, comment ils sont perçus par certains membres de l'organisme d'Oomoto, et comment ils sont réconciliés ou expliqués au sein de cette religion. L'hypothèse suivante est proposée : la dualité entre les courants internationalistes et nativistes dans Oomoto n'est pas une vraie tension, mais plutôt une dualité inscrite dans la doctrine dualiste d'Oomoto « Izu-Mizu ». Cette recherche repose sur une étude de terrain effectuée en automne 2013 dans le centre principal d'Oomoto à Kameoka au Japon. Cette étude, centrée sur des interviews avec des employés, leaders et bénévoles de l'organisme d'Oomoto et accompagnée d'études d'archives et d'observation participante, a pour but de mieux comprendre les rapports entre les aspects nativistes et internationalistes d'Oomoto et de tester l'hypothèse décrite ci-dessus.

Le chercheur tire la conclusion que l'hypothèse proposée n'est pas valide : les aspects nativistes et internationalistes d'Oomoto ne constituent pas une dualité dans le sens de la doctrine d'Izu-Mizu. Les résultats suggèrent plutôt que les éléments nativistes sont perçus comme des aspects non essentiels, tandis que l'essence d'Oomoto est perçue comme étant universaliste.

**MOTS CLÉS** : Oomoto, Esperanto, Deguchi Onisaburo, Deguchi Nao, nouvelle religion japonaise, Japanese new religion



## INTRODUCTION

At first glance, Esperanto – a language created for international use by a Jewish doctor living in the Russian empire of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – would seem to have little in common with Oomoto – a religion based in nativist (full definition of “nativist” in Chapter II.) Shinto and on the apocalyptic prophesies of a poor, illiterate, rural Japanese woman in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, the cosmopolitan, universalist ideals of L.L. Zamenhof (creator of Esperanto) could not be further removed from the nativist, anti-modern and anti-Western views of Deguchi Nao<sup>1</sup> (founder of Oomoto), or so it would seem. Yet, as unapparent as it may appear, Esperanto has become a fundamental part of Oomoto – and Esperanto’s role in Oomoto is only one of several seeming contradictions in this unique religious group.

Oomoto, or 大本 in Japanese script, meaning “Great Source” or “Great Origin” – 大 = “large” or “great”, 本 = source, origin, root – is a Japanese new religion rooted in Japan’s indigenous religion, Shinto, and based on the messianic revelations, conveyed through experiences of divine possession of Oomoto’s founder Deguchi Nao, predicting the “destruction and reconstruction of the world”. In this regard, Oomoto closely resembles other Shinto-based new religions (we will discuss this in detail in Chapter I.). Oomoto also highly values traditional Japanese arts and culture, rigorously follows Shinto ritual forms (to be discussed in detail in Chapter I.), and has a membership almost exclusively composed of Japanese people (with some notable exceptions). All the above mentioned attributes combine to paint a portrait of a very Japanese, even Japan-centric, religion.

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<sup>1</sup> Deguchi is the surname. All Japanese names used in this work are given in the Japanese order: surname followed by given name.

This nationalist or nativist character of Oomoto is, however, called into question when we consider other important aspects of the faith. Since the 1920s, Oomoto has embraced certain internationalist traits which, at first glance, seem out of sync with the above mentioned Japan-centric characteristics. In the 1920s Oomoto introduced Esperanto as the religion's official language for international contacts<sup>2</sup> and also began championing interfaith cooperation – work that is based on Oomoto's doctrine of *bankyo-dokon* which teaches that all faiths share a common divine root. Though Oomoto would later become heavily involved in the World Federalist Movement, the international nuclear disarmament movement and international humanitarian work, Esperanto and interfaith cooperation have remained the defining aspects of Oomoto's internationalism.

Somehow, though, Oomoto manages to function as a coherent, unified religious movement. In this work we will explore the question of this nationalist/nativist-internationalist duality, and how Oomoto perceives this duality and reconciles these two aspects. After presenting a portrait of Oomoto – its history, theology, scripture, rituals, structure, and its place in relation to other Japanese new religions and traditional Shinto – we will look at Oomoto's nativist and internationalist aspects in depth, and explore key concepts in Oomoto, such as Oomoto's role as model and the dualist doctrine of Izu-Mizu. This doctrine, which conceives of reality in terms of opposing polarities – positive/negative, vertical/horizontal, male/female, fire/water, etc.—plays an important role in Oomoto and, I will suggest, could help explain the nativist/internationalist duality in Oomoto.

Though scholarly research on Oomoto has been limited, it is nonetheless not inconsiderable in view of Oomoto's small size. Of particular note are *Prophet motive: Deguchi Onisaburo, Oomoto, and the rise of new religions in Imperial Japan*, by

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<sup>2</sup> English and other national languages are used as well, but, as we will see later, Esperanto maintains a special status in Oomoto.

Nancy K. Stalker, which presents Oomoto's history and development in relation to its charismatic co-founder Deguchi Onisaburo; *Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan: Deguchi Nao and Omotokyo*<sup>3</sup>, by Emily Groszos Ooms, which studies Oomoto founder Deguchi Nao and the context surrounding the early development of Oomoto; *Omoto, espérance millénariste d'une nouvelle religion japonaise*, by Jean-Pierre Berthon, is a broad study of Oomoto history and development, and is the only major work on Oomoto in French.

The latter part of the work will be dedicated to the field study of Oomoto I conducted during a two month period in fall 2013 primarily at Oomoto's main religious center in Kameoka, Japan. The cornerstone of this study consists of 13 interviews with employees, leaders and other people highly engaged in the Oomoto organization. Interviews focused on the interplay of nationalist/nativist and internationalist elements in Oomoto, the role of Esperanto and interfaith cooperation, the universality (or potential universality) of Oomoto, and the relationship of the doctrine of Izu-Mizu with the nativist/internationalist duality. The interview portion was complemented by archival research in Oomoto's main library, and a participant observation portion to place my research object in context. In the fourth chapter we will look at the interview results in depth and by theme: role of Esperanto, role of interfaith activity, role of Japanese cultural aspects, role of proselytism and Oomoto in non-Japanese contexts, and the role of duality and the doctrine of Izu-Mizu.

Before delving into the meat of this thesis, allow me to say a few words about my personal interest in this subject. For a North American, with no Japanese heritage or roots, a rather obscure Japanese new religion would seem an odd choice for research. Certain specific factors, however, led me to choose Oomoto as my research object.

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<sup>3</sup> "Oomoto-kyo" or "Omotokyo" are variant names for "Oomoto". The suffix "kyo" means "teaching" or "belief", and is often used to denote new religions or sects. Oomoto followers consider this form somewhat derogatory, however.



One such factor is the fact that I spent two years (2000-2002) in Japan working as an assistant English teacher (living just a few hours away from Oomoto's main sanctuaries, in fact). Nonetheless, this factor — although necessary in my case — was not sufficient, since foreigners living in Japan are quite common. The key factor in my case was Esperanto. As an Esperanto-speaker active in the Esperanto community for 20 years now, and also active in certain Esperanto organizations, I was (while I was living in Japan) invited by Oomoto's International Department to come visit their main religious center in Kameoka and get to know this religion. I had known about Oomoto since the early days of my involvement with Esperanto — though my knowledge had been limited to Oomoto's support of Esperanto. I had really no idea what Oomoto was about beyond this isolated fact, and I vaguely imagined that Oomoto was some sort of "new age" religion. Upon becoming acquainted with Oomoto, I was both fascinated and perplexed by its character: what I had imagined as a sort of universalistic "new age" sect, actually looked very Japanese, and even traditionalist Japanese. I thus became fascinated with this religion, which projects a quite internationalist outlook, while remaining firmly grounded in traditional Japanese culture. Upon visiting Japan again in 2012, I was invited to come back to the Oomoto Center for a brief stay — I then became convinced that Oomoto was a very suitable object for my research.



## CHAPTER I

### PRESENTATION OF OOMOTO

#### 1.1 Oomoto in scholarly literature

As mentioned in the introduction, academic research on Oomoto has been fairly limited. Nevertheless, three major scholarly works on Oomoto are available, and they form the core of literature for this study: *Prophet motive: Deguchi Onisaburo, Oomoto, and the rise of new religions in Imperial Japan*, by Nancy K. Stalker, *Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan: Deguchi Nao and Omotokyo*, by Emily Groszos Ooms, and *Omoto, espérance millénariste d'une nouvelle religion japonaise*, by Jean-Pierre Berthon.

The Stalker work focuses on the figure of Oomoto co-founder Deguchi Onisaburo. His life and activities are presented in detail, as well as the history and orientations of Oomoto from the time of its founding up until Onisaburo's death in 1948. Stalker emphasizes Onisaburo's charisma, entrepreneurship (hence the pun in the title: "prophet motive") and leadership skills in the expansion and development of Oomoto, arguing that without Onisaburo Oomoto would have remained a small regional sect. Stalker devotes separate chapters to nativism (the term she herself uses and defines, as opposed to "nationalism") and internationalism, without, however, focusing heavily on the relationship between these two elements.

The work by Ooms focuses on Oomoto's founder, Deguchi Nao, and the socio-economic context in which she lived and had her revelatory experiences. Ooms presents Nao's revelations as a socially acceptable form of protest against the Meiji-

era economic and political reforms. As a woman (who was also poor, uneducated and of low social standing), political engagement was not possible. On the other hand, Japanese folk religion had a long-standing tradition of women acting as mediums for *kami*. Ooms argues that Nao's experience of divine possession acted as a channel of expression for her underlying discontent with the changes being introduced to Japanese society by the imperial regime.

The work by Berthon (the only scholarly work on Oomoto in French) presents a broad portrait of Oomoto's history and development from its founding through the death of Onisaburo (and slightly thereafter) and situates Oomoto within the context of other Japanese new religious movements. The author notes also that, in common with millenarian movements, Japanese new religions are dominated by the personality of a founding figure(s). The author adds that all the female founders of Japanese new religions were "possessed" by *kami*. What's more, there is a tradition in Japanese folk religion in which a female medium is possessed by a *kami* while a "specialist of the sacred" (always a male) interprets her revelations. Thus, Nao and Onisaburo's relationship follows a known model (Nao as vehicle of revelation, Onisaburo as interpreter of revelation).

Minor scholarly works of note include "From *Gokyo-dogen* to *Bankyo-dokon*: A Study in the Self-Universalization of Omoto" (article in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*) by Richard Fox Young, which discusses the doctrine of *bankyo-dokon* and the role of interfaith cooperation in the 1920s, and "Ômotos mission på esperanto.: En japansk ny religion i förändring från kiliastisk Maitreyaförväntan till religionsdialog" ("The Ômoto-Mission in Esperanto.: A Japanese new religion in change from chiliastic Maitreya-awaiting to religious dialogue"), a doctoral dissertation by Leif Nordenstorm (2002)<sup>4</sup>, which gives a good overview of the role of Esperanto in Oomoto's

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<sup>4</sup> The full dissertation was not directly accessible as it is written in Swedish. Nonetheless, the dissertation includes lengthy summaries both in Esperanto and in English.

international activity, and provides a theological perspective on Oomoto's concepts of the world, God and humanity (the author is a Lutheran theologian).

The major flaw of the above scholarly works is the timeframe they cover: all these works, in large part, only cover the early history of Oomoto up through the death of Onisaburo in 1948 (the Nordenstorm work covers the post-war years briefly, but not extensively). To supplement these shortcomings, non-scholarly works were consulted. These include *A Portrait of Oomoto*, by Bill Roberts (2006), an account of contemporary Oomoto by an American journalist who spent 14 months living at the Oomoto Center in Kameoka (primarily) and conducting interviews with staff, clergy and followers<sup>5</sup>, *Rakontoj el Oomoto (Stories from Oomoto)*, by Roman Dobrzyński (2013), an account by a Polish Esperanto-speaking filmmaker who spent five months living at the Oomoto Center in Kameoka, and had also produced a film, *Japana Printempo: Oomoto 2009 (Japanese Spring: Oomoto 2009)*, and finally, *An encounter with Oomoto "The great origin" : a faith rooted in the ancient mysticism and the traditional arts of Japan*, by Frederick Franck (1975), a look at Oomoto from an artist's perspective.

The third category of sources were sources directly from the Oomoto organization: *The Great Onisaburo Deguchi*, by Deguchi Kyotaro (1998), an extensive biography of the co-founder of Oomoto written by his grandson, *Nao Deguchi: A Biography of the Foundress of Oomoto*, by Oishi Sakae (1982), the official biography of Nao, as well as *Diaj Revelacioj* (the "international" Esperanto version of the *Oomoto Shinyu*) and other Oomoto publications.

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<sup>5</sup> All through translation from Japanese to English, as the author is fluent in neither Japanese nor Esperanto.



## 1.2 History of Oomoto

### 1.2.1 Founding period (1892-1918)

According to Oomoto tradition, Oomoto was born on the Lunar New Year in 1892, when Deguchi Nao (photo in Appendix C), a poor, illiterate woman of 55 years, began experiencing a vivid series of mystical “spirit dreams” involving encounters with a divine being. A few days later, on February 3, 1892, Nao fell in to a trance and began to speak with a loud, authoritative, male voice. This entity would subsequently identify himself as the *kami*<sup>6</sup> Ushitora-no-Konjin<sup>7</sup>, who instructed Nao to take up a writing instrument to record his revelations through a process of automatic writing. These writings, prophetic and messianic in tone, would form the foundation of Oomoto doctrine.

Yet this dramatic founding account leads one to believe that Nao’s experience of spirit possession (and even her encounter with the *kami* Ushitora-no-Konjin) came as a bolt from the blue. It is necessary, therefore, to place Nao and her experiences in their proper historical and religious contexts.

1892 was the height of the Meiji era in Japan. This era, which began in 1867 with the restoration of the imperial house<sup>8</sup> and the reopening<sup>9</sup> of Japan to the West, was one of unprecedented social and economic change. The Meiji Emperor pursued an aggressive

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<sup>6</sup> *Kami*, normally translated as “god” or “deity” has diverse meanings, ranging from “spirit” or even “essence”, to “god” or even “God” in the monotheistic sense.

<sup>7</sup> Ushitora-no-Konjin, a folk deity associated with the northeast direction (*ushitora* = northeast in Japanese direction divination) generally considered malevolent in mainstream Shinto. In the belief of Konko-kyo, and subsequently Oomoto, Konjin is seen as a manifestation of absolute deity.

<sup>8</sup> Although there had always been an emperor on the throne, he was mostly symbolic. Real political power was in the hands of the Tokugawa Shogun. After the fall of the Shogunate the Emperor was restored to political power in 1867 (Berthon, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> From the early 17<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the government of Japan pursued a policy of strict isolationism: foreigners were not allowed to enter Japan and Japanese were not allowed to leave; Christianity was strictly forbidden, as was all Western knowledge, languages, etc. (Ibid.)

program of westernization and modernization, introducing capitalism, Western knowledge, educational styles and technology, Western political and military ideas, etc. This westernization did not, however, apply to the sphere of religion. Christianity, while legal, was discouraged. The Meiji Emperor, seeking legitimacy<sup>10</sup>, established Shinto as the state religion, separating it from Buddhism, which was then relegated to a secondary role.<sup>11</sup> This new State Shinto was, however, essentially a mouthpiece for the government and was more concerned with boosting nationalistic sentiment rather than spirituality.

This rapid social, economic and religious change was a destabilizing factor for many Japanese. This was especially true for those living in rural areas, where a greater cultural conservatism was dominant and where the economic changes did not bring greater prosperity to everyone – in fact, the opposite was true. Land reform policies cut the ties that traditionally held peasants to the land. This forced many peasants to seek manufacturing jobs in larger towns and cities. Thus, from the rural perspective, the newly imported capitalist system brought poverty, rather than the prosperity promised by the government. It was in precisely this environment that Deguchi Nao lived when she communicated the first revelations (Ooms, 1993).

According to Oomoto's official biography of the Founder, Deguchi Nao was born Kirimura Nao in the city of Fukuchiyama in the famine-stricken Tamba region of Japan in 1837. Following the death of her father, at age nine Nao took on various odd jobs to help support her family. At the age of 16 Nao was adopted by her aunt, Deguchi Yuriko<sup>12</sup>, who, childless, sought an heir to carry on the Deguchi family name and care

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<sup>10</sup> According to traditional Shinto the emperor is the direct descendant of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu (Ibid.).

<sup>11</sup> Since the introduction of Buddhism into Japan in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE a certain syncretic and symbiotic relationship had developed between the two religions, to the point where most Japanese were not aware of any clear distinction between the two. The forceful separation of Shinto from Buddhism was confusing and disconcerting for most ordinary Japanese (Ibid.).

<sup>12</sup> Due to the importance of caring for the ancestral family spirits, it was common practice in Japan for childless couples to adopt the child of a relative (Oishi, 1982).

for the family's ancestral spirits after Yuriko's death. Nao moved to the Deguchi household in Ayabe and thereafter bore the surname Deguchi. Deguchi Yuriko also adopted a young man, Masagoro, whom she had chosen as a husband for Nao<sup>13</sup> (Oishi, 1982).

Masagoro, a skilled carpenter by trade, was given to laziness and heavy drinking, causing his business to suffer. Nao, stern and austere by nature, disapproved of her husband's conduct, yet tolerated him out of a sense of duty. Masagoro's alcoholism and financial irresponsibility caused him to accumulate huge debts, which ultimately forced them to sell off most of the Deguchi estate. At the age of 58, Masagoro suffered an accident that permanently injured his back – rendering him invalid and unable to work. Thereafter Nao was solely responsible for supporting the family, selling *manju* (sweet rice cakes) and collecting rags, an occupation only a step above begging<sup>14</sup> (Ooms, 1993).

In 1890 Nao's daughter Hisa had a nervous breakdown. As was common at the time, this condition was believed to be caused by an evil spirit. A Konko-kyo<sup>15</sup> practitioner was called in to perform an exorcism. The practitioner intoned the name of Konko-kyo's main deity, Ushitora-no-Konjin, over the course of the ritual. Hisa quickly recovered, leading Nao to attribute her daughter's healing to this deity. A year later, another of Nao's daughters, Yone, was similarly struck with mental illness. Yone's husband, however, refused any sort of religious intervention – Yone never recovered.

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<sup>13</sup> Nao clashed with her aunt Yuriko and objected to her plans to have her married to Masagoro, and thus, for a time, came back to her birth family. Nonetheless Yuriko threatened to haunt the Kirimura family after her death if Nao did not return and marry Masagoro. Yuriko subsequently committed suicide, and Nao fell ill a few days later. Assuming that the ghost of Yuriko was the cause, Nao consented to the marriage and moved to Ayabe (Ooms, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Nao had attempted to find employment in silk factories (in the nearest urban center), but was ultimately unsuccessful as she could not be away from her ailing husband for extended periods (Ibid.).

<sup>15</sup> Konko-kyo is another Shinto-based new religion venerating Ushitora-no-Konjin as a benevolent deity.



Nao's first experiences of *kamigakari* (spirit possession) would follow soon after the onset of Yone's illness (Ibid.).

Following the initial spirit dreams, Nao was given to unpredictable bouts of possession, roaring prophetic warnings of the coming destruction and reconstruction of the world to random people and generally behaving in an erratic manner. Due to the alarming content of the prophecies and her odd behavior, Nao's relatives were urged by neighbors to put her under a sort of house arrest, locking her in a room, hoping the disturbing behavior would subside. It was during this time of detention that Nao, often unable to sleep or eat due to the possessions, petitioned the deity (Ushitora-no-Konjin) to relieve her of this behavior. He then instructed her to take up a brush and write, assuring her that he, not she, would do the writing. Having no brush in the room, Nao picked up a nail and began to scratch words on a wooden post, her hand moving on its own (she would continue these writings with brush and ink, once these materials became available to her). Thenceforth the deity's communications would continue through Nao's hand in written form, reaching approximately 200,000 pages by the time of her death in 1918. Nao, being illiterate, would have to rely on others to read and interpret these writings (Oishi, 1982).

Having already had positive contact with Konko-kyo, and due to Konko-kyo's veneration of the same *kami*, Ushitora-no-Konjin,<sup>16</sup> Nao sought to establish a relationship with the Konko-kyo organization – a relationship that would add legitimacy (including government recognition, as Konko-kyo was a sanctioned Shinto sect) and structure (including its network of temples) to Nao's revelations. As her revelations originated from the same *kami*, Nao (naively) believed the Konko-kyo leadership would recognize the superiority of her revelations, as they were more recent. The Konko-kyo leadership, on the other hand, saw Nao (who practiced faith-healing

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<sup>16</sup> Ushitora-no-Konjin was the *kami* who initially possessed the Konko-kyo founder. Nonetheless, the religion would later come to focus on a higher absolute deity, Tenchi-Kane-no-Kami (Ooms, 1993).

since the start of her possession) as a way to attract members. Nao felt frustrated with the lack of progress of Ushitora-no-Konjin's divine plan within the Konko-kyo framework, while also feeling she lacked the organizational competence to start an independent religious organization (which, in addition, would be fraught with risk, as non-sanctioned religious organizations were threatened with police intervention) on her own. This tenuous relationship with Konko-kyo would thus continue until the end of the 1890s (Ooms, 1993).

In a certain passage of Nao's automatic writings, it is stated that "A person who will be able to understand these things will appear from the East" (Deguchi K., 1998, p. 31). Nao knew not who this person might be or when he might appear, but she hoped that this person would be able to help her in her mission. In October 1898, an eccentric figure from Anao (a village southeast of Ayabe) arrived in Ayabe, asking around about an old woman who is a medium of Ushitora-no-Konjin. Once the man had located her, Nao was taken aback by his appearance:

Far from the gallant figure one might expect, the man who presented himself to Nao was a strange and comical-looking youth sporting an old-fashioned cloak and blackened teeth<sup>17</sup> and carrying an umbrella and a basket" (Deguchi K., 1998, p. 31).

This man, Ueda Kisaburo (later to become Deguchi Onisaburo – photo in Appendix C) would leave an indelible mark on the Oomoto movement.

Ueda Kisaburo was born in 1871 to a poor farming family (which, nonetheless, was of a more prosperous lineage, but had fallen on hard times), also in the Tamba region (the same region as Deguchi Nao), in the town of Anao. Though coming from a humble background like Nao, Kisaburo nonetheless had much greater exposure to culture and education. Having gone to live with his grandmother Uno, who was educated in poetry and classics, Kisaburo became familiar with classical poetry and literature, as well

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<sup>17</sup> Teeth-blackening was a custom usually associated with married women at the time (Stalker, 2008).



*kotodama* (the traditional esoteric teaching that words and sounds, particularly of the Japanese language, contain mystical powers), an idea that would fascinate him throughout his life. He also showed keen interest in drawing and painting. This interest in classics and arts would be reinforced when he later studied under the nativist scholar Okada Korehira in the 1890s. Kisaburo also benefited from the Meiji-era education reforms that introduced compulsory education (Stalker, 2008).

Throughout his youth, Kisaburo would pursue various entrepreneurial schemes in attempts to make money, all the while dedicating himself to artistic pursuits on the side. This entrepreneurial spirit would later become clearly evident in his organization of Oomoto (Ibid.).

The death of his father in 1897 plunged Kisaburo into a deep depression, accompanied by heavy drinking. He was often involved in fights with creditors trying to collect on his father's debts. On February 28, 1898, Kisaburo was attacked by a band of thugs who beat him mercilessly and left him unconscious. Slipping in and out of consciousness, Kisaburo saw a man dressed in Western clothing<sup>18</sup> beside him. The man invited Kisaburo to follow him to a mountain just outside Asao. In a small cave on this mountain, Mount Takakuma, Kisaburo would spend a week of asceticism (meditating, fasting, praying), over the course of which he claims to have experienced a spiritual journey through various dimensions of the spirit world. Kisaburo would later record his experience in his voluminous work *Reikai Monogatari (Tales from the Spirit World)*. He left the experience with newly acquired occult powers (healing, clairvoyance, etc.) and a profound sense of divine mission<sup>19</sup> (Ibid.).

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<sup>18</sup> "The interesting twist of a spirit guide in Western clothing suggests that unlike most early Oomoto believers, Kisaburo was open to Western influences and viewed these positively" (Stalker, 2008, p. 33).

<sup>19</sup> Berthon notes the typical marks of shamanistic experience: « l'initiation dans la montagne avec l'aide probable d'un ascète; le voyage cosmique à travers les trois mondes, sous la conduite de messagers; la conquête de la puissance et des pouvoirs magiques; la nouvelle vie difficile parmi le monde des vivants. Cette expérience n'avait rien d'inhabituel »

Wishing to distinguish himself from itinerant healers and exorcists, and recognizing the need for a successful religious movement to be tied to an officially sanctioned religion or sect, Kisaburo joined Inari-Kosha, a Shinto sect dedicated to the *kami* Inari (deity associated with rice cultivation and foxes, which were traditionally believed to be shape-shifters). Kisaburo then studied under the sect's leader, Nagasawa Kasutoshi, who taught him the technique of *chinkon-kishin*<sup>20</sup> and bestowed upon him the title of master exorcist.

In summer 1898, during prayer, Kisaburo received a divine message to go to Sonobe, a town northwest of Anao, where someone would be waiting for him. On his way to Sonobe, Kisaburo stopped by a tea shop to rest. The shop's owner asked the strangely dressed man what line of work he was in, to which he replied "an investigator of the gods". The shop owner (who was also Deguchi Nao's daughter) described her mother's experiences to him. Hearing this, Kisaburo decided to visit Nao in Ayabe. The first meeting between the two, however, was not particularly successful. Nao was suspicious of Kisaburo's ties with Inari-Kosha (believing he was involved in magical practices with fox spirits), as well as his youth (he was then 27, while she was 62). Nonetheless, despite Nao's initial doubts, Kisaburo's name began to appear in her automatic writings from this point forward, and Nao thus came to the realization that this odd man would be the one to help her organize the Oomoto movement. Likewise, Kisaburo felt more and more that his mission was in line with Nao's revelations (Deguchi, 1998).

Upon the second meeting of Nao and Kisaburo in July 1899, the two founded a new spiritual organization called the Kinmei Reigakukai,<sup>21</sup> the first independent organization of Oomoto as such. Kisaburo subsequently began working on interpreting

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<sup>20</sup> "Pacifying the soul and uniting with *kami*", a method to induce intentional and controlled *kamigakari* (spirit possession) (Ooms, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> "The Bright Metal Association for the Study of Spirit, the first character of the name paralleling the first character of Konjin" (Stalker, 2008, p. 38). "Konjin" here refers to "Ushitora-no-Konjin".

Nao's revelations, systematizing the religion's theology, and developing ritual (Stalker, 2008).

In 1900 Kisaburo married Nao's youngest daughter Sumiko and was adopted into the Deguchi family. Thenceforth he would be known by the name of Deguchi Onisaburo. While the change to the surname Deguchi is clear, the transition from Kisaburo to Onisaburo requires some explanation. Onisaburo's grandson Deguchi Kyotaro writes:

Once, when he was still busying himself with his spiritual studies and practices in his native Anao, he had signed his name Kisaburo not with the proper Chinese character *ki* which means 'rejoicing', but with another character with the same pronunciation which means 'demon'. This character can also be pronounced *oni*, so that as written his signature could also be read 'onisaburo'. This was at the time when he was known as Kiraku Tengu, the 'free and easy goblin' (1998).

Though Onisaburo would later write his name using a different character pronounced *oni*, but not meaning 'demon' (as the name "Onisaburo" written with this different character had started to appear in Nao's revelations) this original meaning of "Onisaburo" demonstrates his sense of humor and taste for provocation.

At this point it is useful to make mention of the contrasts between these two founding figures. As we have seen, there was a significant age and education gap between the two, but they were actually quite opposite in many ways. As Bill Roberts notes:

Nao and Onisaburo were complete opposites: female and male; old and young; cautious and impulsive; pragmatist and eccentric; introvert and extrovert; illiterate and educated. The differences were endless, but God intended this. The *Ofudesaki*<sup>22</sup> repeatedly declares the opposites are the only way to build Oomoto and reconstruct the world (2006, p. 91).

We will look into this idea of opposites in greater depth in the following chapter. It is worth noting at this point, however, that these contrasting personalities would lead to certain tensions in the early development of organized Oomoto.

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<sup>22</sup> The name of Nao's revelations, in unedited form.



One such area of tension was the practice of *chinkon-kishin*. This practice of inducing spirit possession by ritual means, which Onisaburo introduced to Oomoto, garnered much attention and attracted new followers to the movement. Nao was opposed to this practice, believing that, at best, it distracted followers from Ushitora-no-Konjin's plan of world reform, or, at worst, threatened the authority of her revelations. After all, if any follower could invoke possession by a *kami* it was entirely possible that a *kami* claiming to be superior to Ushitora-no-Konjin, or even Ushitora-no-Konjin himself bearing new revelations, could possess an individual who, in turn, would be led to challenge Nao's original revelations, leading to splintering of the movement<sup>23</sup>. Despite Nao's opposition, *chinkon-kishin* would continue into the 1920s when Onisaburo himself abandoned the practice and introduced a simpler, less "risky" meditational method of attaining divine communion (Ooms, 1993).

Onisaburo also faced opposition from Nao's original followers who saw him as an interloper who was trying to take over the Oomoto movement. Many of these followers expected (as did Nao) the imminent destruction and reconstruction of the world (in fulfillment of Ushitora-no-Konjin's plan) and took the content of Nao's revelations quite literally, while Onisaburo had a more nuanced approach (Stalker, 2008).

Things began to change in May, 1905, when Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese war. Nao had prophesied the defeat of Japan at the hands of Russia, which, in turn, would usher in the destruction of the world (to be followed, of course, by the reconstruction of the world). When this prophecy failed, Nao's credibility was undermined, and many followers left the movement. From this point on, Onisaburo's influence over Oomoto would only continue to grow as Nao's influence waned (Ooms, 1993).

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<sup>23</sup> This actually occurred in one particularly notable case: then Oomoto follower Taniguchi Masaharu experienced his own series of revelations while using this technique, and he would later abandon Oomoto and found his own religion, Seicho-no-Ie (Ooms, 1993).

Oomoto's ambiguous (outright illegal, strictly speaking) status in the eyes of the state was an ongoing source of worry for the movement in its early days as an independent organization. Seeking some sort of legitimacy, in 1906 Onisaburo withdrew from active involvement in Oomoto to study for the Shinto priesthood in Kyoto. Returning to Oomoto in 1908, armed with solid Shinto ritual skills and holding the state-recognized title of Shinto priest, Onisaburo took a clear leading role in Oomoto, taking over outright from Nao. He then founded a new "secular" organization, the Dai Nippon Shusaikai (Society for the Purification and Reform of Japan) to serve as a front for the Oomoto religion. Though strictly secular and "patriotic" (i.e. not directly critical of the imperial system) in its stated purpose, the society was clearly a thinly veiled Oomoto: its publications were filled with religious rhetoric, and Oomoto shrines were usually hidden on the second floor of Shusaikai branch offices. Nonetheless, this strategy would help Oomoto carry out missionary activities relatively free of government interference – for a time (Roberts, 2006).

Under Onisaburo's leadership the movement continued to rapidly expand. In 1916 the organization changed its name to Kodo Oomoto – Oomoto of the Ancient Imperial Way (Stalker, 2008).

### 1.2.2 Expansion and internationalism (1918-1948)

With the death of Deguchi Nao in 1918 Onisaburo became the unrivaled central figure of Oomoto<sup>24</sup>. Open to new ideas and innovation, which would have been shunned by the conservative Nao, in 1920 Onisaburo bought a widely circulated daily newspaper, the *Taisho Nichinichi Shimbun*, which he would blatantly exploit as a platform for his

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<sup>24</sup> Deguchi Sumiko, Nao's daughter and Onisaburo's wife, was named Second Spiritual Leader of Oomoto (this position must always be held by a female).

religious and social ideals, as well as his criticism of the contemporary regime and ruling classes (Roberts, 2006).

As it attracted more and more converts, largely due to Onisaburo's personal charisma, and gained greater visibility through the media, Oomoto was subject to greater scrutiny and interest from state officials. In January 1921, the Home and Justice Ministries, relying mostly on sensationalistic media accounts of "perverse" secret activities in Oomoto and accusations from disgruntled former members, issued arrest warrants for Onisaburo and other Oomoto leaders. The charges against Oomoto were vague, centering on *lèse-majesté* (disrespect of the Emperor, in this case) and the religion's socially "dangerous" ideology. Released on bail in June 1921, Onisaburo would not be cleared of charges until 1927. This first episode of massive police intervention would come to be known as the "First Oomoto Incident" (or "First Oomoto Suppression"). Over the course of this incident, police detained around 80 Oomoto followers, dismantled Deguchi Nao's tomb (claiming that it too closely resembled the Emperor's tomb) and demolished an Oomoto temple, under the charge that it resembled the imperial Grande Shrine of Ise (Stalker, 2008).

In the internationalist atmosphere of the years following the First World War and, perhaps, in an attempt to move away from the controversial prophetic predictions of Nao's revelations in the wake of the First Oomoto Incident, in the 1920s Onisaburo extended his concerns beyond the borders of Japan, introducing a number of internationalist innovations to Oomoto.

Probably the most surprising of the internationalist innovations introduced by Onisaburo was the introduction of Esperanto as Oomoto's official language for international relations in 1923. Esperanto, a language created with the hope of uniting the peoples of the world with a common neutral language, was not an obvious choice for Oomoto, which had been dominated by Japan-centric concerns up to this point:



The climate at Oomoto was strongly xenophobic under Nao's leadership, when foreigners were viewed as devils or beasts and foreign languages were thought to be evil. Although Onisaburo had been intrigued by Esperanto since 1913, he was unable to pursue his interest because of the anti-foreign feeling that prevailed at Oomoto. Nao's death and the departure of Asano Wasaburo and other oppositional factions removed the obstacles to his investigation of the universal language (Stalker, 2008, p. 156).

Esperanto has maintained an important role in Oomoto since its introduction in 1923 through the present day. The exact nature of the language's role, however, has changed over the course of time and is still open to the interpretation of individual believers. We will examine the role of Esperanto in Oomoto in greater depth in the following chapter.

The second important internationalist innovation introduced by Onisaburo in this period was the concept of interfaith cooperation. Though commonplace today, interfaith cooperation was quite novel at the time. Onisaburo based Oomoto's practice of interfaith cooperation on the doctrine of *bankyo-dokon*,<sup>25</sup> usually rendered in English as "all religions spring from the same source", a doctrine that was revealed to Onisaburo during his mystical experience on Mount Takakuma and recorded in his *Reikai Monogatari*. In the early years of Oomoto's interfaith activity, contact was mostly limited to other small new religions, especially those with a spiritualist bent. The first interfaith partnership Oomoto established began in 1923 with Tao Yuan (also called the "Red Swastika Society"), a Chinese new religion based on Taoism and also practicing automatic writing (Deguchi K., 1998). Oomoto would later build partnerships, albeit usually on a limited scale, with larger, more established religions. We will discuss the role of the doctrine of *bankyo-dokon* and interfaith cooperation in Oomoto in the following chapter.

Yet another international undertaking launched during the 1920s was the *Jinrui Aizenkai*, officially called the "Universal Love and Brotherhood Association" (ULBA)

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<sup>25</sup> Literally "ten thousand teachings, one root".

in English. Founded in 1925, this organization was intended to be a sort of secular branch of Oomoto, open to non-believers, and dedicated to humanitarian and peace-building work in Japan and throughout East Asia. The guise of ULBA also allowed many of Onisaburo's key ideals (interfaith cooperation, universal brotherhood, respect for life and nature) to be promoted without much of the religious baggage and legal complications tied to Oomoto as an organized religion (Nao's prophecies, Shinto-based ritual and mythology, etc.), and it also facilitated activity outside of Japan (Stalker, 2008).

During this same period of intense international activity, Onisaburo would embark on a particularly odd undertaking. In 1924, accompanied by Aikido<sup>26</sup> founder Ueshiba Morihei and other Oomoto followers, Onisaburo travelled to Mongolia, with the hope of establishing a new independent country.<sup>27</sup> Having teamed up with Chinese general Lu Zhankui (a convert to Oomoto), with support from Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin, Onisaburo led Lu's army of around 500 men into Mongolia. Along the way, Onisaburo healed people and performed exorcisms, declaring himself to be the reincarnation of the Buddha, the Dalai Lama and Genghis Khan, and gaining the sympathy of the people. In the meantime, Zhang, originally supportive, feared that Lu and Onisaburo would betray him. He therefore asked one of his local allies to ambush Lu's army. Lu's army was massacred, while Onisaburo and the other Japanese were captured, only narrowly escaping execution due to Japanese consular intervention. Despite the mission's failure, however, Onisaburo was not discredited – to the contrary, he attained new heights of popularity and Oomoto was reinvigorated (Roberts, 2006).

Onisaburo remained under close surveillance following the First Oomoto Incident (having sneaked off to Mongolia illegally) until his pardon in 1927 during the general amnesty following the Emperor Taisho's death. In the following years, Oomoto would

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<sup>26</sup> Aikido is a martial art that incorporates many Oomoto spiritual concepts.

<sup>27</sup> The People's Republic of Mongolia had been declared a short time prior.



enjoy a time of relative freedom from government interference. Yet Onisaburo did not give up his social criticism, and continued to garner media attention. The media accused Onisaburo of an “intention to mold a new union between politics and religion, and then create some kind of imperial-religious-socialist society with Onisaburo at the top” (Roberts, 2006, p. 102). Onisaburo’s activities and potential ambitions did not escape state scrutiny.

On December 8, 1935<sup>28</sup>, Japanese police began a full scale raid on Oomoto. Onisaburo was arrested, and over a thousand Oomoto followers were detained and subjected to interrogation – some even torture. Oomoto’s headquarters and main temples and religious buildings were destroyed by the police with dynamite. After several years in court, in 1940 Onisaburo was sentenced to life in prison, while several other Oomoto officials were given shorter sentences. Similarly to the First Oomoto Incident, Onisaburo and his supporters were charged with *lèse-majesté*, as well as conspiracy to usurp the Imperial Throne (Deguchi Kyotaro, 1998).

Though Onisaburo, his wife (and Second Spiritual Leader) Sumiko and other Oomoto prisoners were released in 1942, this suppression – the Second Oomoto Incident – left the organization in shambles. Onisaburo lived out his remaining years quietly, devoting his time mostly to his art, though steadfastly unrepentant in his opposition to the war and his certitude that Japan would be defeated.<sup>29</sup> After the declaration of religious freedom under the new post-war constitution, Onisaburo would re-launch Oomoto under the name Aizen-en (Garden of Love and Goodness). In January 1948, Onisaburo died at the age of 76 (Ibid.).

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<sup>28</sup> It is interesting to note that this date is exactly six years before the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor (Deguchi Kyotaro, 1998). We will discuss the importance of correspondences such as these in the section entitled “Oomoto as model”.

<sup>29</sup> Onisaburo encouraged drafted Japanese soldiers to fire their guns into the air, instead of firing on the enemy (Stalker, 2008).

### 1.2.3 Rebirth and stability (1948-present)

With the death of Onisaburo in 1948, Oomoto was, for the first time since its founding, no longer under the direct guidance of one of its founding figures. It was from this point on that Oomoto would take on a more institutionalized form, no longer focused on living prophetic or charismatic figures. The Second Spiritual Leader, Sumiko (Onisaburo's widow), continued to lead Oomoto during the difficult rebuilding process following the Second Oomoto Incident until her death in 1952.

The Third period of Oomoto history truly begins with Onisaburo's and Sumiko's daughter Deguchi Naohi, Third Spiritual Leader. Naohi, who resumed the use of the straightforward name "Oomoto" for the organization, would set Oomoto on a course significantly less messianic and less political than in the previous two periods. As the prophetic, austere and xenophobic Nao had set the tone for the first period of Oomoto history, the flamboyant, political, extroverted and media-savvy Onisaburo had done for the second, so too the introverted, thoughtful and artistic Naohi would set the tone for the third period of Oomoto history.

Under Naohi's leadership Oomoto would focus increasingly on the arts – traditional Japanese arts in particular. Such focus was not without precedent, however. Onisaburo displayed genius in painting, calligraphy, ceramics and poetry (to name but a few), and declared that "art is the mother of religion". But while art was more of a personal interest for Onisaburo (and of no interest whatsoever for Nao), Naohi made practice of traditional arts and preservation of traditional Japanese culture an institutional concern. In present-day Oomoto, believers are strongly encouraged to study one or several traditional arts as part of their religious practice.

The focus on the arts in the post-war period actually led to a dramatic revival of one of Onisaburo's earlier concerns: interfaith cooperation. In 1972, Oomoto launched a

traveling international exhibition of Onisaburo's works. This exhibition, which would last over three years and visit thirteen cities in Europe and North America, featured Onisaburo's *Yowan* ("scintillating bowls"<sup>30</sup>). In 1975, when the exhibition was in New York, a meeting between the Very Reverend James Parks Morton (Dean of the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine) and Deguchi Kyotaro would result in an Oomoto Shinto-style liturgy being performed in the Episcopal Cathedral. This event would lead to reciprocation on the part of Dean Morton, who came to perform an Anglican liturgy in Oomoto's main temple in Ayabe in 1977 (photos in Appendix C). Such exchanges would increase in number over the following years, and interfaith cooperation remains important to this day (Oomoto Foundation, 1997).

Upon Naohi's death in 1990, her daughter Deguchi Kiyoki became the Fourth Spiritual Leader of Oomoto. Kiyoko would preside over the completion and inauguration of the Choseiden, the largest and most impressive temple built in the religion's history, fulfilling a plan originally conceived by Onisaburo in 1934. Furthermore, to realize Onisaburo's dream that the Choseiden would be a house of worship for all faiths, in November 1993 representatives from Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shinto, Japanese and other new religions, and other groups were invited for a joint prayer forum (Ibid.).

Following Kiyoko's death in 2001, Deguchi Kurenai, Kiyoko's adopted daughter<sup>31</sup> became Oomoto's fifth, and current, Spiritual Leader.

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<sup>30</sup> Name given to Onisaburo's tea bowls, produced mostly in his final years. These bowls epitomized his character: to this ancient Japanese art, Onisaburo applied his own innovative, convention-breaking approach. These bowls began to garner attention from the art world a few decades after his death.

<sup>31</sup> Kiyoko, not having a direct heiress, adopted a close relative from the Deguchi family (Okuwaki T.).



### 1.3 Scriptures, theology, ritual, and organization

#### 1.3.1 Scriptures

As Oomoto has two founding figures, likewise Oomoto has two founding sacred texts. These texts, like their authors, have quite different styles and tone.

Oomoto's first sacred text is the *Ofudesaki*, roughly meaning "from the tip of the brush". This text comprises the totality of Deguchi Nao's automatic writings in raw, unedited form. This last distinction – i.e. that the *Ofudesaki* are Nao's revelations in *unedited* form – is a fundamental one. All Nao's automatic writings are written entirely in *hiragana*,<sup>32</sup> without punctuation, and many archaic and obscure terms are used, making the writings extremely difficult to read. The classically educated Onisaburo took on the task of rendering the texts comprehensible by adding *kanji* to clarify the meaning of words, adding punctuation and logically organizing the text into paragraphs, etc. Onisaburo even left out some of the more inflammatory passages critical of the Japanese government and the Emperor. The resulting five-volume text, called the *Oomoto Shinyu* (*Oomoto Divine Revelations*), constitutes the canonical version of Nao's revelations, as, according to Oomoto teaching, only Onisaburo could fully grasp and interpret Nao's automatic writings (Ooms, 1993).

Thus, the average Oomoto believer generally views Nao's revelations through the lens of Onisaburo. Such a practice, however, is not without precedent in the Japanese religious context. Oftentimes a female medium would serve as the mouthpiece or channel for a *kami*, while a male priest or shaman would serve as interpreter:

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<sup>32</sup> *Hiragana* is a phonetic Japanese syllabary that is normally used in combination with *kanji* (Chinese ideograms) to write the Japanese language. *Hiragana*, however, conveys only sound, while meaning is usually conveyed via *kanji*. Due to numerous homophones in Japanese, a text written in *hiragana* alone can be quite ambiguous and unclear.

The combination of female mystic and male manager at the head of new religions was not uncommon. It reflected older folk practices using female mediums and male shamans/interpreters; these in turn derived from an ancient ideal of rulership by a “dual-gender pair,” with women controlling the sacred realm and men supervising the secular. The postwar new religions Reiyukai and Rissho Koseikai had similar arrangements. Other traditional and new religious movements across South and Southeast Asia also share this male/female division of labor (Stalker, 2008, p. 38).

As to the content of the *Ofudesaki/Oomoto Shinyu*, the tone is apocalyptic and prophetic. The current state and direction of the world is condemned, and readers are warned continuously of the coming destruction and reconstruction of the world,<sup>33</sup> which would be followed by a utopic world in which neither poverty nor excessive wealth exists, and in which humanity lives in harmony with God and nature. The *Ofudesaki* stresses the need for humans to “purify their hearts” and return to a simpler, agrarian lifestyle, free from industrialism, capitalism, exploitation and excess. The focus of the *Ofudesaki* is the current age and the immanent renewal of the physical world – the preoccupation with more spiritualist concerns prevalent in later Oomoto is absent.

Oomoto’s second (chronologically speaking, at least) canonical text is Onisaburo’s voluminous work *Reikai Monogatari (Tales from the Spirit World)*. This 81-volume work recounts Onisaburo’s journeys through the spirit worlds during his week-long mystical experience on Mount Takakuma. In content, tone, style and literary form the *Reikai Monogatari* could not be more different from the *Ofudesaki*. In describing his Dantesque journey through the spirit realms (which are divided into heavenly realms, intermediate realms and infernal realms), Onisaburo vividly describes encounters with various deities and religious figures (both Japanese and not), demons, spirits and other

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<sup>33</sup> The term used for “destruction and reconstruction” of the world is *tatekae-tatenaoshi*. These terms are commonly used in construction, and especially to the Shinto practice of periodically (in the case of the Grand Shrine of Ise, every 20 years) dismantling shrines and rebuilding them on the same location using new materials. Thus, for Nao, the world had become rotten and dilapidated, in need of purification and renewal (Ooms, 1993).

mythological beings, running the gamut of literary and rhetorical forms (prose, poetry, debate, social-criticism, satire, etc.). The comprehensive character of the work attests to the author's erudition, with references to Japanese mythology, theology of other world religious traditions, as well as Western thought. As Bill Roberts writes:

Onisaburo covered the divinity of God, the relation between God and man, the origin of Oomoto, the state of the spiritual world, the creation of the universe, the divine administration of the world, morality, politics, economics, education, art, love and many other topics ... He incorporated tenets of other religions, rephrased Christian hymns for Oomoto use, expounded on Buddhist divinities, examined Confucian and Daoist ideas and clarified ancient Shinto texts, which he said were misunderstood ... The *Monogatari* extols peace and love, condemns xenophobic patriotism and promotes a philosophy of universal salvation. No wonder the imperial government saw Onisaburo as a threat (2006).

While the two canonical scriptures are officially placed on equal footing, observation suggests that there is a preference for the *Reikai Monogatari* among current Oomoto believers. This can probably be attributed to the timeless, otherworldly quality of the work which is not so closely tied to apocalyptic predictions of world reform as is the *Ofudesaki*. In modern, prosperous, technologically advanced Japan, where the social inequality and poverty felt so vividly in Nao's time are no longer realities for most people, the dire prophecies of undoing the present corrupt age and promises of a utopic world may resonate less strongly. On the other hand, the spiritual depth and complexity of Onisaburo's writings (though much less direct and clear-cut than the *Ofudesaki*) lend themselves to a wide range of interpretation that can be applied to a variety of situations and contexts. What's more, the *Reikai Monogatari* receives greater attention in the regular spiritual practice of believers. An example of this is the common practice among committed believers of reading<sup>34</sup> the entire 81-volume work over the course of a year. Some believers strive to complete this task every year.

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<sup>34</sup> The recommended method is by reciting the texts aloud, as the sounds of the words themselves are believed to be imbued with mystical power, according to the teaching of *kotodama* (Okuwaki T.).



Due to the sheer volume of writings, combined with the religion's limited resources and translation difficulties, making the two canonical works available in non-Japanese languages has proved challenging. In 1999 the *Oomoto Shinyu* was made available in Esperanto. This edition, however, is called the "international edition", and is significantly abridged, constituting one single volume, as opposed to five (the same abridged text is also available in Portuguese). The translation of the *Reikai Monogatari* has proved more daunting. Though excerpts from Onisaburo's masterwork have continuously been published in Oomoto's Esperanto and English periodicals (and in Portuguese, as well as other languages at times) since the 1920s, no comprehensive translation has been completed to date. Saito Hiroshi, Director of Oomoto's Doctrinal Department, noted that translation of the *Reikai Monogatari* is fraught with difficulty. In addition to the utter length of the work (81 volumes vs. the five volumes of the *Oomoto Shinyu*), the nuances of Onisaburo's language are very difficult to faithfully render in other languages. Onisaburo made extensive use of word-play and double (or even multiple) meanings of words. Plus, significant portions of the work are written in verse (compared to the straightforward prose of the *Oomoto Shinyu*). In light of these considerations, therefore, it becomes obvious why the *Oomoto Shinyu* was chosen as the first of the canonical texts to be officially published in foreign languages, despite the fact that the *Reikai Monogatari* would probably be of greater interest to an international audience.

### 1.3.2 Theology

As suggested by the religion's motto, *Unu Dio, Unu mondo, Unu Interlingvo*,<sup>35</sup> Oomoto emphasizes the unity of God. Nonetheless, Oomoto's concept of divinity is not a simple monotheism. According to Oomoto's conception of divinity, God is experienced in monotheistic, polytheistic and pantheistic terms.

Oomoto teaching posits an absolute deity or first cause which is the source of all existence. This eternal and infinite absolute deity is called Ookunitokotachi or Amenominakanushi (the latter term is also used in Shinto for a primordial deity pre-existing all other deities). To avoid confusion, in Esperanto (English or other language) explanatory texts this absolute deity is written as GOD, while other aspects of divinity are written as God or god, depending on the case (Oomoto, Doctrinal Department, 2008).

Oomoto does not, however, consider the Shinto gods or the gods of other religions to be false. Other deities are considered to be part-spirits<sup>36</sup>, or emanations, of the one GOD, and, as such, are to be worshipped as true Gods or gods ("Gods" denotes the ruling deities of the heavens and earth, while "gods" denotes benevolent lower *kami* and angels). Like parts of the human body, each deity is assigned a specific function in the universe (Ibid.).

Furthermore, Oomoto does not believe in a separation between creator and creation: God is the substance of the universe, and the divine character infuses the whole

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<sup>35</sup> "One God, One World, One Interlanguage (or International Language)" – this motto, introduced by Onisaburo in the 1920s when Esperanto was introduced into Oomoto, is originally and officially in Esperanto, not Japanese.

<sup>36</sup> This notion (*bunrei*) is based on the common Shinto practice of "division" of a *kami* so that a new branch shrine may be established (Berthon, 1985). Though called "division", the idea is more like a new fire being lit from another flame.



universe. Nonetheless, while God is all and is in all, God also exists beyond creation<sup>37</sup> (Ibid.).

Yet, if Ookunitokotachi (Amenominakanushi) is the Absolute Deity, where does Ushitora-no-Konjin come into the picture? To answer this question, we must examine the mythology behind Oomoto's founding.

According to Oomoto doctrine, Ushitora-no-Konjin is one and the same as Kunitokotachi (not to be confused with Ookunitokotachi), the ruler of the earth and father God of all earthly life. Kunitokotachi / Ushitora-no-Konjin is a direct part-spirit of absolute GOD. In the ancient era of the gods, Kunitokotachi reigned supreme over the earth, presiding over a golden era when harmony and peace reigned. Yet other deities, having grown lazy and corrupt, began to fear Kunitokotachi, and they joined forces to force him into seclusion in the northeast of the earth (*ushitora* refers to the northeast). Thenceforth under the rule of corrupt and materialistic (literally, body-over-spirit-ist) gods, the earth degenerated into violence and egotism. This state persisted and worsened until the world was on the brink of cataclysm. Thus, in 1892 Ushitora-no-Konjin came out of seclusion to proclaim, through Deguchi Nao, the destruction and reconstruction of the world (Ibid.).

But why would a powerful God like Kunitokotachi allow himself to be forced into seclusion? Oomoto doctrinal sources provide the following simplistic analogy as explanation: the deities who forced Kunitokotachi into seclusion were like teenagers rebelling against their parents. They had to be allowed to make their own mistakes. But when the state of affairs had reached a critical point, the responsible "parent" was forced to intervene to prevent disaster<sup>38</sup> (Ibid.).

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<sup>37</sup> Oomoto sources call this the "pantheistic" aspect of Oomoto theology, though it would be more accurate to call it "panentheistic".

<sup>38</sup> A comparison could also be made with the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, and the subsequent redemption of the world by Christ.

As we have seen, Oomoto is centered on two founders and two founding scriptures associated with these founders. Likewise this duality is also manifested on a divine level: as Ushitora-no-Konjin is associated with Nao, Hitsujisaru-no-Konjin<sup>39</sup> (corresponding to the deity Toyokumonu according to Oomoto teaching), wife of Ushitora-no-Konjin, is associated with Onisaburo. The idea of a male deity manifesting through a female body and a female deity manifesting through a male body is intimately related to the doctrine of Izu-Mizu (to be discussed in detail in the following chapter). What is more, Hitsujisaru-no-Konjin, as counterpart to Ushitora-no-Konjin (God of the Earth), is believed to be the God of Heaven, who will descend to earth so that the divine plan may be fulfilled and the world of *Miroku*<sup>40</sup> brought about (Ibid.).

### 1.3.3 Ritual and ceremonies

As to ritual, to an outside observer Oomoto closely resembles Shinto – often to the point of being indistinguishable. Liturgical vestments follow the same basic style of those worn by *kannushi* (Shinto priests).<sup>41</sup> Oomoto temples differ from standard Shinto shrines in that ordinary local Shinto shrines usually have little or no interior space for accommodating worshippers, as worshippers usually stand in front of the shrine for brief personal prayer, with any seating space inside the shrine reserved for families or small groups participating in special rituals. Oomoto temples, nonetheless, resemble other sectarian Shinto temples (such as Konko-kyo or Tenri-kyo), and Buddhist

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<sup>39</sup> “Hitsujisaru” refers to the southwest – while Ushitora-no-Konjin was in seclusion in the northwest, his wife went into seclusion in the southwest (Oomoto, Doctrinal Department, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> “Miroku” is the Japanese form of Maitreya. Though Onisaburo was usually identified as Miroku in the earlier days of Oomoto, in the postwar years it has become more common to speak of *miroku-no-yo*, “the world of Miroku”, the utopic age following the destruction and reconstruction of the world (Nordenstorm, 2002).

<sup>41</sup> Shinto liturgical vestments are based on the clothing style of the imperial court of the Heian period.

temples as well, with large *tatami*<sup>42</sup> rooms facing the main altars so that large groups may participate in communal group worship.

Oomoto prayers, or *norito* in Shinto parlance, are standardized, with only four prayers that are regularly used by believers: the *Kamigoto*, *Amatsu-Norito*, *Sorei-Haishi*, and *Miyabi No Kotoba*. The first three of these are based on standard Shinto prayers (only slightly modified by Onisaburo) – only the last one, *Miyabi No Kotoba*, was composed by Onisaburo and is unique to Oomoto. The *Kamigoto* is recited at daily evening prayer and during other rituals. The *Miyabi No Kotoba* is used for daily morning prayer, the *Sorei-Haishi* is the prayer for ancestral spirits, and the *Amatsu-Norito* is used on all occasions, and is considered the most basic prayer (not unlike the Lord's Prayer in Christianity). In group or family worship, these prayers are chanted in unison by all worshippers. In addition to these basic prayers, worshippers also make use of a *Sanbika*<sup>43</sup> (hymnal) containing poems that are normally all sung to the same basic tune without instrumental accompaniment.

Most Oomoto believers conduct daily morning and evening prayer in their homes in front of their home altars. These altars, which can range from very small to large, generally have, at minimum, a *go-shintai* ("sacred body of the *kami*"),<sup>44</sup> small vessels and a tray for making daily offerings of rice and water, fresh pine branches in vases and candles. Next to the main altar there is usually a smaller altar dedicated to the ancestral spirits, where food from the family's meals is offered daily. These home altars, while usually larger and arranged differently from the standard Shinto *kamidana* ("*kami* shelf") traditionally found in Japanese homes, are nonetheless very simple and humble in appearance, especially when compared to the ornate Buddhist altars used to venerate ancestral spirits in most Japanese households.

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<sup>42</sup> Woven straw mats used as floor covering in traditional Japanese buildings.

<sup>43</sup> It is said that Onisaburo introduced the concept of a hymnal to Oomoto after having attended Christian worship services (Okuwaki T.).

<sup>44</sup> A focal point for worship and the presence of God. Usually this consists of the divine name written in calligraphy on paper and housed in a small wooden shrine.



Daily morning and evening prayer at the main Oomoto centers in Ayabe and Kameoka, however, involves a special routine. In addition to the staff who work at these locations and local Oomoto members, pilgrims from across the country come to the centers for periods of personal spiritual renewal and retreat. These believers, and other guests staying at the centers, are encouraged to wake up early<sup>45</sup> and go to clean the temple before morning prayer. This period of cleaning is supposed to be symbolic of the purification of one's heart. After the conclusion of morning prayer, worshippers embark on a mini-pilgrimage through the center's grounds, stopping for brief periods of prayer at smaller shrines dedicated to the founders, missionaries, etc. Only then do worshippers assemble in the dining hall for breakfast. At the end of the day, just before supper, the same routine is repeated, minus the cleaning.

The basic liturgy in Oomoto (excluding daily prayers) follows Shinto patterns. The same basic elements are found in practically all Oomoto liturgies: ritual purification, offering of food to the deity, ritual prayer by the officiating priest, communal prayer using one or more of the above-mentioned forms (usually the *Kamigoto* and *Amatsu-Norito*), and the offering of pine branches (*tamagushi hoten*). The food offerings consist mainly of uncooked staples: rice, vegetables, fish, sake, salt and water.<sup>46</sup> Meat (meaning non-fish animal protein) is not offered, and the food products offered are typically those associated with a pre-modern Japanese diet.<sup>47</sup> After the service, many of the foods are divided up and distributed among worshippers, and worshippers are invited to partake of the blessed sake.

In smaller Oomoto centers all worshippers may be invited to approach the altar and offer pine branches, a symbol of eternity in Oomoto. At larger events, only dignitaries

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<sup>45</sup> Commonly before sunrise – traditional music is played over the sound system throughout the complex, followed by a recorded message reminding pilgrims and guests that morning prayer will commence shortly.

<sup>46</sup> Cooked foods are normally offered to ancestral spirits in the home, but not to the deity.

<sup>47</sup> When rituals are performed outside of Japan local foods may be substituted. In Mongolia, for example, vodka is often substituted for sake (Kimura K.)



and special guests are invited, followed by a couple (always male and female) representing the rest of the worshippers. During my field study I attended the Autumn Grand Festival<sup>48</sup> and, together with another foreign guest, was invited to participate in this ritual (photo in Appendix C). The offering worshipper approaches the high altar where he or she receives a pine branch adorned with *shide*<sup>49</sup> from a priest. The worshipper then goes to stand directly facing the high altar and, holding the branch up with both hands, bows three times, places the branch in the provided receptacle, claps four times<sup>50</sup> and then bows again.

The most basic Oomoto service is called the *Tsukinamisai* (“monthly festival”). This ceremony is celebrated once per month (usually on the first Sunday of the month) and follows the basic pattern outlined above. *Tsukinamisai* is celebrated in the main temples in Ayabe and Kameoka, in regional and local centers, and, for those unable to attend the service elsewhere, it may be performed on a small scale in the home. The *Tsukinamisai* at the Kameoka temple is often followed by a presentation of Noh drama and/or tea ceremony (Dobrzynski, 2013).

In addition to these monthly festivals, Oomoto celebrates four grand festivals throughout the year. Unlike the *Tsukinamisai*, these festivals are only held at one of the two main temples. *Zuisei*, the Grand Summer Festival, is celebrated in August in commemoration of Onisaburo. This festival is the only grand festival celebrated at the Kameoka temple. *Oomoto-Kaiso* is celebrated in November in Ayabe in commemoration of Nao (photos in Appendix C). *Miroku*, in May, also in Ayabe, celebrates the World of Miroku to come. Oomoto’s largest and most important festival, however, is Setsubun, celebrated on the third of February.

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<sup>48</sup> This was the only Grand Festival that occurred during my 2013 field study. Nevertheless, when I lived in Japan from 2000 to 2002 I attended all four Grand Festivals at some point.

<sup>49</sup> Paper folded in a zigzag fashion (resembling lightening) frequently used in Shinto ritual.

<sup>50</sup> In Shinto prayer and ritual two claps are customary, while Oomoto prescribes four.

Setsubun (which I attended in 2002) is quite a spectacle and merits special mention. This festival commemorates the beginning of Nao's revelations and is seen as the liturgy of the "great purification of the universe". The ceremony, held at Oomoto's largest and most important temple in Ayabe, begins on the evening of February third and lasts through the night. The ceremony begins with the basic ritual elements found in the *Tsukinamisai* and other ceremonies. The ceremony then transitions to the purification portion of the ritual. First, "purification maidens" perform a ritual purification dance. This is followed by the longest portion of the ceremony, the blessing of *hitogata*. *Hitogata*<sup>51</sup> are small sheets of rice paper with a stylized human form printed on them. Each individual writes his/her name, address and date of birth on the *hitogata* (such papers with a different design are available for homes, vehicles, businesses, etc.). It is believed that during the Setsubun purification ritual one's negative energy from the preceding year is wiped away and blessings are bestowed for the coming year through the *hitogata*.<sup>52</sup> In the months preceding Setsubun, Oomoto believers collect *hitogata* from family, friends, neighbors and the surrounding community (some even go door-to-door)<sup>53</sup>. A small donation is customary, but one need not be an Oomoto believer to participate. During the longest portion of the Setsubun ceremony, these *hitogata*, placed in large ceramic jars, are prayed over by priests and specially prepared "purification maidens",<sup>54</sup> who then carry the jars in processional to the nearby Wachi River, into which the *hitogata* are dumped from a bridge. Due to the number of *hitogata* this process is repeated throughout the night. While this is going on, the assembled worshippers, led by a priest, chant the *Kamigoto* prayer in continuous loop throughout the night. Though there is always a large group

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<sup>51</sup> *Hitogata* means "human form".

<sup>52</sup> A similar custom is practiced in standard shrine Shinto, though, since the Meiji era, the purification ritual is associated with New Year's day (according to the Gregorian Calendar).

<sup>53</sup> The believer holding the record collected over 11,000 (Roberts, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> Though the term "maiden" is used, one can observe that these may be women of any age and marital status.

continuously reciting the prayer, worshippers may leave the sanctuary from time to time to refresh themselves, or participate in the procession to the river.

#### 1.3.4 Organization and structure

Oomoto is led by the Spiritual Leader, who must be a woman of the Deguchi matrilineal line.<sup>55</sup> The Spiritual Leader, however, does not involve herself much in the day-to-day operations of the organization, but rather devotes her time to arts, creation and blessing of *go-shintai* for believers' home altars, meeting dignitaries and making official visits. Administration of the organization is left to the president and board of Oomoto (Okuwaki T.).

Oomoto employs no full-time professional clergy. Priests are members who have undergone a special training process that qualifies them to perform ritual. That said, many full-time employees at the Oomoto centers are also ordained priests. Men or women may serve as priests, though, by convention, only males serve at rituals in the main temples in Ayabe and Kameoka.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, women often serve as priests in local centers (Okuwaki T.).

Oomoto has two principal spiritual centers, in Ayabe and Kameoka. The Ayabe Center (Baisho-en<sup>57</sup>), considered the center of worship and ritual, is associated with Nao, as this is where her revelations began. The Kameoka Center (Ten'on-kyo<sup>58</sup>), considered the center of missions and administration, is associated with Onisaburo, as he was born

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<sup>55</sup> As we have seen, adoption is also acceptable.

<sup>56</sup> Upon questioning this practice, great pains were taken to explain to me that this is not a "discriminatory" practice, but just "custom".

<sup>57</sup> "Garden of Plum and Pine Trees"

<sup>58</sup> "Birthplace of Heavenly Benevolence"



here<sup>59</sup> and had his mystical experience on nearby Mount Takakuma. As the center of administration, most of Oomoto's paid staff is based here, with only a small staff based in Ayabe. While the Kameoka Center is always abuzz with activity (courses, workshops, etc.), the Ayabe Center has a serene, reflective atmosphere (except when thousands of believers swell the center at Grand Festivals and other events). The Spiritual Leader has residences in both cities, dividing her time between the two as needed (Okuwaki T.)

Besides these two main centers, Oomoto also maintains a large center in Tokyo. Though this center, unlike Ayabe and Kameoka, has no special spiritual status, the demographic weight of Tokyo places this center as third in importance. Other large cities have Oomoto centers in dedicated buildings, while Oomoto congregations in small towns are often housed in the homes of believers (Okuwaki T.).

Membership in Oomoto is maintained by making an annual or monthly financial contribution, adhering to the basic tenets of Oomoto, and committing to daily prayer. The question of membership numbers is, however, a bit trickier. The stated number of members is 170,000, though the organization is reluctant to reveal the details of this statistic (i.e. whether this number includes only active members in good standing, or whether it includes children, inactive members, etc.), making it difficult to ascertain the number of active Oomoto believers. Nonetheless, this number stands in sharp contrast to the 1,000,000+ Oomoto followers under Onisaburo's leadership (Stalker, 2008).

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<sup>59</sup> Anao, Onisaburo's birth village, is now part of the city of Kameoka.



## 1.4 Religious classification of Oomoto

### 1.4.1 Oomoto as a Japanese new religion

The classification of Oomoto as a “Japanese new religion” – the usual English rendering of the Japanese term *shin-shukyo*<sup>60</sup> (lit. “new religion”) – should not be taken to mean simply a religion founded recently, or newer relative to ancient, established religions. In the Japanese context, *shin-shukyo* refers to a specific category of religions (sects or movements) that were founded in the nineteenth century or later and share certain common characteristics. These new religious movements were founded most often in response to radical social change or upheaval. The relationship between the appearance of Japanese new religions and drastic social change is illustrated by the waves or phases of the emergence of these groups. According to Nancy Stalker:

Current scholarship identifies five distinct phases: the latter half of the nineteenth century, the prewar period (1920s and ‘30s), the postwar period (1950s and ‘60s), the post oil-shock period (late 1970s and ‘80s), and the current post-Aum Shinrikyo period following the heinous subway gassing incident by a new religion in 1995” (Stalker, 2008, p. 6)

These religions are most often based upon Buddhism or Shinto, or, more rarely, Christianity, or inspired by these traditions, oftentimes with significant borrowings from other religions and philosophies, as well a folk practices. That said, Japanese new religions often make rather drastic departures from their source traditions and are generally not thought of as still belonging to these parent traditions. For example, (predominantly) Shinto-derived traditions such as Oomoto and Tenri-kyo focus on revelation through a charismatic founder, sacred scripture as a record of said revelation, and apocalyptic/messianic/world-renewal prophecies. Such concepts are foreign to

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<sup>60</sup>The term *shinko-shukyo* (“newly emerged religions”) is also frequently encountered, though, due to the sometimes pejorative connotations of this term, the preferred neutral term is *shin-shukyo* (Berthon, 1985).

traditional Shinto which tends toward natural religion (nature worship, the divine revealed through nature) and ancestor worship, lacks revealed sacred scripture<sup>61</sup>, and emphasizes continuity and stability.

*The Encyclopedia of Religion* defines five characteristics common to nearly all Japanese new religions:

- 1) Establishment within the last two centuries, usually characterized by features that suggest a religious response to crises of modernity, 2) A definite moment of establishment and, usually, a founder possessing special charisma, 3) An important new, distinctive revelation or realization, expressed through some novel doctrine and usually attributed to supernatural sources, 4) a separate institutional structure, 5) Distinctive rites or practices (Ellwood, 1987).

Other characteristics mentioned include: founding through shamanistic experiences of the movement's founder; a theological perspective tending towards monotheism or monism; syncretism; an eschatology announcing an imminent transformation of the world; and a sacred center or city serving as a focus of pilgrimage, worship and administration, while also serving as a model of the renewed world to come (Ellwood, 1987).

Let us now consider how well Oomoto fits this model. Oomoto was founded through the founder's experience of possession by a deity who communicated a new divine revelation through her (shamanistic experience and revelation); Oomoto stresses the unity of God (monotheism); Oomoto incorporates concepts from Buddhism and Christianity (and other sources) into a Shinto ritual framework (syncretism); the founder's revelations announce the coming deconstruction and reconstruction of the

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<sup>61</sup> The *Kojiki* and *Nihon-Shoki*, while loosely considered Shinto texts, are actually historical and mythological chronicles. These do not serve as any sort of revealed scripture in the same way that the Bible, Koran, or the scriptures of Japanese new religions do.

world (apocalyptic eschatology); Oomoto maintains two centers in the (for Oomoto) holy cities of Ayabe and Kameoka that are considered microcosms of the utopic world to come; and Oomoto was established on a specific date (the date the founder's revelations commenced) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century during the social upheaval brought on by Meiji era modernization.

Thus, Oomoto fits quite clearly into the category of Japanese new religion. In many respects, one could say that Oomoto represents the typical or model Japanese new religion. Yet Oomoto's place in the greater category of Japanese new religions is not limited to the religious organization today known as Oomoto. In fact, Oomoto stands at the head of a whole sub-category of Oomoto-derived new religions and sects (termed the "Oomoto Group" by Harry Thompson in *The New Religions of Japan*). These derived groups tend to focus on the teachings of one of Oomoto's founders – not exclusively, but most typically on Oomoto co-founder Deguchi Onisaburo. This phenomenon may be attributed to Onisaburo's personal charisma and his complex, esoteric teachings that lend themselves to a wide range of interpretation. Therefore, though Oomoto has remained small as a religious organization, the influence of its founders has been wide-reaching, greatly exceeding the scope of institutionalized Oomoto<sup>62</sup>.

#### 1.4.2 Oomoto as a Shinto sect

Though, as we have seen, Oomoto represents a clear example of a *shin-shukyo* (new religion), it is nonetheless distinctly rooted in Shinto.

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<sup>62</sup> Seicho-no-ie, founded by former Oomoto follower Taniguchi Masaharu, is a particularly notable example, with over 1 million followers worldwide.



Shinto is normally divided into three broad categories: shrine Shinto, state Shinto and sectarian Shinto. Shrine Shinto, the mostly widely practiced form today, centers on worship at local shrines dedicated to tutelary deities (either natural deities or deified humans). State Shinto (declared illegal after WWII) claimed the Emperor to be the divine direct descendant of the solar goddess Amaterasu and associated Shinto with patriotism. Sectarian Shinto, however, was born from an attempt to bring sectarian Shinto-based movements and new religions into the imperial system. As the state system of officially sanctioned shrines were more civic than religious, commissioned with performing official rites, but not with moral or doctrinal teaching, religious Shinto was seen as the domain of sectarian Shinto (Stalker, 2008). Therefore, in the late Meiji (1868-1912) and early Taisho (1912-1926) period the government of Japan sanctioned thirteen sects of Shinto: Kurozumi-kyo, Shinto Shuseiha, Taisha-kyo, Fuso-kyo, Jikko-kyo, Shinto Taisei-kyo, Shinshu-kyo, Mitake-kyo, Shinto Taikyo, Shinri-kyo, Misogi-kyo, Konko-kyo, and Tenri-kyo<sup>63</sup>. This designation enabled these sects to carry out their activities without government interference, in exchange for which, however, they were precluded from criticising the imperial system (Berthon, 1985).

Oomoto is noticeably absent from the above list. Although Oomoto founder Deguchi Nao attempted to operate for a time under the roof of the officially designated sect Konko-kyo (which, like Oomoto, worshipped Ushitora-no-Konjin) in the early days of the Oomoto movement, the radical nature of her prophecies and her fierce criticism of the state would ultimately render this arrangement unworkable (Ooms, 1993). Thus, Oomoto's lack of official sanction combined with its criticism of the imperial regime would lead to ongoing clashes with the government up until the end of WWII.

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<sup>63</sup> Tenri-kyo renounced its designation as a Shinto sect in 1970, claiming to be entirely separate from Shinto.



## CHAPTER II

### THEORY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### 2.1 Nativist and internationalist elements in Oomoto

##### 2.1.1 Definitions

###### “Nativist” vs. “nationalist”

I have chosen the word “nativist” to describe Oomoto’s Japan-centric aspects rather than “nationalist” because the latter (especially in the Japanese context) is often associated with militarism and imperialism (both concepts based on imported ideas) – tendencies that Oomoto largely opposed from its beginning. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “nativism” thusly: “return to or emphasis on indigenous customs and traditions, esp. in opposition to those introduced from elsewhere” (*OED Online*). Furthermore, Nancy Stalker describes Japanese nativism thusly:

Nativism, or kokugaku (also known as National Learning) initially developed in reaction to the strong influence of Chinese learning (*kangaku*), including Confucianism and Buddhism. In contrast to the formalism, rationality, and logic found in Chinese learning, Nativism celebrated emotion, beauty, and indigenous Japanese tradition. It asserted the superiority and divinity of Japanese culture... Like their earlier counterparts, nineteenth-century Nativists were generally anti-foreign, but the target of their hostility had shifted from China to the encroaching West (2008, p. 46).

Furthermore, there is a translation difficulty involved here as well.<sup>64</sup> The Esperanto term *nacieca*, used by interview subjects to describe the aspects of Oomoto I have generally labeled as “nativist”, has no good equivalent in English. *Nacieca* (derived from the root *naci-* [nation], with the suffix *-ec-* [denoting abstract quality], plus the adjectival ending *-a*) roughly means “having to do with nation/nationality” or “having a national character”. It does not mean “nationalist” (which in Esperanto would be *naciista*), nor does it mean just “national” (which would be *nacia*). When translating from Esperanto into English (as in the interviews, where this term recurred frequently), I was forced to use less than appropriate terms, such as “nationalist” to translate the more nuanced term *nacieca*. Nonetheless, whenever the term “nationalist” occurs in the interview section, it is to be understood in the sense of cultural nationalism only, not in the sense of political nationalism. Furthermore, for the purposes of this work, no distinction is made between “nativist” and “nationalist” (in the cultural, not political, sense).

#### “Internationalist” vs. “universalist”

The term “internationalist” in this work is much more straightforward in comparison to the terms “nativist” and “nationalist”, as the term is not employed in any particular way other than one would normally expect, and coincides with the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition: (internationalism) “international character or spirit; the principle of community of interests or action between different nations” (*OED Online*). Thus, “internationalist” in the context of Oomoto refers to those aspects which reach clearly and intentionally beyond the scope of the Japanese people, nation, language and Shinto religion, with the purpose of engaging with other peoples and religions. Within Oomoto this most clearly applies to the use of Esperanto (and activities tied in with Esperanto) and interfaith activity, which has, from the beginning of Oomoto’s interfaith

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<sup>64</sup> In light of this difficulty, great pains were taken during the interviews to make clear the sense of the words being discussed. For more details see Chapter III.

activity in the 1920s, always included cooperation with non-Japanese religions, as well as Japanese religious groups. Internationalism also applies to many other activities throughout Oomoto's history, however, such as international humanitarian work through the Universal Love and Brotherhood Association, international cooperation for nuclear disarmament and environmental protection, and the World Federalist Movement.

“Universalism” – “the principle of regarding humanity as a whole, rather than in terms of different nations, races, etc.” (*OED Online*) – in the context of Oomoto refers to those ideals of the religion that apply to humanity as a whole, rather than to the Japanese people, or Oomoto followers, in particular. These ideals, namely the unity of religions and the brotherhood of humanity, provide the idealistic framework for Oomoto's internationalist activities.

### 2.1.2 Nativist elements

As we saw in the historical outline, the transition in leadership from Nao to Onisaburo brought about a shift away from the Japan-centric nativism of Nao's era and towards internationalism and openness to the greater world. Onisaburo's embrace of Esperanto and interfaith work, along with his concern for world peace and universal brotherhood, contrasts so starkly with Nao's parochial and xenophobic outlook that one is tempted to equate Onisaburo exclusively with the internationalist aspect of Oomoto, while attributing the nativist elements to Nao. In reality, however, the distinction is not so clear-cut. While Onisaburo was certainly a far more cosmopolitan figure than Nao, his thinking and outlook were nonetheless informed by a more nuanced nationalism. Stalker contrasts the two founders' perspectives thusly:



Under Nao's leadership, hatred and fear of the foreign were strong. Early followers not only rejected *kanji* but also refused vaccinations as foreign intrusions into the Japanese body and threw salt on foreigners to purify them or exorcise their demons. Nao's vision of utopia was of a simple, frugal world where people grew their own food and relied on natural products for clothing and housing. There would be neither luxury nor vice; no silk, tobacco, fancy sweets, or gambling. Onisaburo's vision, on the other hand, was more cosmopolitan in scope. It envisioned world peace, economic justice, universal brotherhood, and world communication via Esperanto. It was not xenophobic in the sense of narrow-minded hatred of the Other. Rather it elevated the Japanese Self, proclaiming parity or superiority with Western norms of civility and accomplishment (2008).

Nao had clung to a form of nativism that rejected all things foreign as being contrary to the will of the *kami*, and thus in disharmony with the natural order. Nao's rejection of foreign ideas went beyond opposition to Western ideas, encompassing also rejection of Chinese influences that had long been deeply integrated into Japanese culture: Confucianism, Buddhism, and especially *kanji*. As noted earlier, all of the *Ofudesaki* was written in *hiragana*, which Nao perceived as a pure Japanese form of writing,<sup>65</sup> while *kanji* was associated with elitism and intellectualism in her mind. Onisaburo, however, found Nao's narrow perspective to be superstitious and narrow-minded, and instead believed that adoption of certain foreign ways and ideas, combined with a respect for nature and the divine way of the *kami*, would lead to the progress and prosperity of Japan (Ooms, 1993).

Yet, in today's Oomoto the narrow, xenophobic nativism of the early period under Nao's leadership has little remaining influence, having been eclipsed by Onisaburo's more nuanced, cosmopolitan approach. This becomes quite clear upon any extended contact with the Oomoto organization and its followers. Foreigners are warmly

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<sup>65</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that *hiragana* was originally derived from elements of *kanji*. Thus, while *hiragana* is unique to Japan, in the sense that this script is not used in any other language, it is nonetheless not of purely indigenous origin.



welcomed<sup>66</sup> at Oomoto centers and temples, and are encouraged to learn about Oomoto and Japanese arts, and are routinely invited to participate in Oomoto ceremonies and rituals. Also, further attesting to the move away from the nativism of the early period, whenever I inquired about the xenophobic and anti-foreign orientations of Nao and early Oomoto followers, many respondents were quick to assure me that such views were based on a misunderstanding of the true revelations of *Ushitora-no-Konjin* – a misunderstanding which Onisaburo corrected through his inspired editing of the *Ofudesaki* and his own writings.

Nonetheless, certain nativist or Japan-centric elements persist within Oomoto, and many of these are so fundamental to Oomoto's identity that they cannot be overlooked.

First of all, as we discussed earlier, Oomoto ritual practice closely follows that of Shinto, Japan's indigenous national religion. In contrast with much of Onisaburo's theology, which incorporates ideas from a wide variety of sources, there is no noticeable syncretism on the liturgical level. Even in cases where Oomoto liturgy is performed outside of Japan, as in the case of the temple in Brazil or the nascent Oomoto center in Mongolia, the basic Shinto ritual and prayer forms are still closely followed, with allowances for minor accommodations as dictated by local circumstances.<sup>67</sup> This strict adherence to Shinto ritual form would seem to be in line with Nao's nativist desire to return to primitive Japanese religion, devoid of Buddhist influences.

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<sup>66</sup> Foreigners visiting and spending time at the main Oomoto centre in Kameoka is so commonplace that there seems to be a steady stream of foreign guests always passing through. During my field study at the main Oomoto center, I encountered an American anti-capital punishment activist, a group of Christian theological students from Germany, an American tea ceremony practitioner, a group of American art enthusiasts, and others, in addition to various Esperantist visitors.

<sup>67</sup> For instance, chairs may be used (instead of the normal Japanese practice of sitting *seiza* on a *tatami* floor), some elements in the local language added (though not the main ritual prayers), and certain local foods may be substituted for offerings when Japanese foods are not readily available. These adjustments, however, are made for convenience, rather than out of a conscious attempt to incorporate non-Japanese elements into the ritual (Kimura K.).

Along the same lines, the Japanese language has an important role in Oomoto – a role that goes well beyond its use as a means of communication in an overwhelmingly Japanese context. Based on the principal of *kotodama* (the belief that sounds are invested with mystical power), the spoken words of Japanese are believed to have a sacred character all of their own. For this reason the fundamental prayers are almost always recited in Japanese, even by non-Japanese believers in other countries. This idea quite astonished me when I first encountered Oomoto: having learned about Oomoto only through its connection with Esperanto, I fully expected that prayers and liturgies would regularly be performed in that language. My subsequent personal experience with Oomoto and my questioning on this subject during the interview portion of the study have shown the opposite to be true. Though Esperanto, English, Portuguese and other translations of the prayers are available, these are not considered to have the same sacred character as the original Japanese versions, and generally these translations are used more for explanatory purposes than for ritual use. As it was explained to me, the *combinations of sounds* contained in the prayers is more important than the meanings of the words themselves, which are difficult even for Japanese speakers to understand due to the archaic and esoteric vocabulary used.

In the previous two sections we mentioned practice of Oomoto outside Japan and non-Japanese Oomoto believers. While Oomoto does maintain a temple in Brazil and has in recent years started an Oomoto center in Mongolia, Oomoto believers outside of Japan remain a very small percentage of the total. If ethnic Japanese living outside Japan are taken out of consideration<sup>68</sup>, the number of Oomoto believers outside Japan is tiny indeed. What is more, according to the English version of Oomoto's official website,<sup>69</sup> non-Japanese should not be encouraged to join:

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<sup>68</sup> Brazil has a large ethnic Japanese population, and the majority of Oomoto believers at the temple in Brazil are fully or mixed ethnic Japanese (Asai K.).

<sup>69</sup> This quotation was on the English version of the Oomoto website up through the period of my field study. The page has since been updated and this text has been removed.

Oomoto does not encourage people from outside Japan to join. The traditional Japanese rituals and practices can be difficult for a foreigner. Because Oomoto teaches that all religions come from the same source, Oomoto believes it is more appropriate for people to participate in religions more suitable to their own culture and language. That said, Oomoto does have a few non-Japanese members, usually the spouses of Japanese, or people with some other strong connection to Oomoto, through the arts, for example.<sup>70</sup>

As I would learn over the course of the study, however, this view is not unanimously shared – in fact, many respondents were surprised to learn that such a statement was on the English version of the website. Nonetheless, despite lack of consensus on the idea of encouraging non-Japanese to join (we will discuss this in detail in Chapter IV), this passage does illustrate perceived difficulties or barriers to conversion of non-Japanese, which is reflected in the actual Oomoto membership, overwhelmingly ethnic Japanese in composition.

Another element of nativism in Oomoto is the idea that Japan has a special mission or role in the divine plan. The Japanese traditionally held the belief that Japan is *shinkoku* – the divine land of the *kami*. Instead of rejecting this idea outright, Onisaburo sought to integrate the notion into a more global framework. One example of this is Onisaburo's reinterpretation of the term *yamato damashii* (Japanese spirit), a term traditionally loaded with racist Japan-supremacist connotations, to indicate instead a spirit of humanitarianism and protection of the weak – anyone who follows the path of God, according to Onisaburo, has the spirit of *yamato damashii*. Another example is Onisaburo's use of the Bible to justify Japan's special status. With the story of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, as basis, Onisaburo argued that three great races descended from these three sons: the *Semu*, the *Hamu* and the *Yahetto*.<sup>71</sup> He claimed that the *Semu*, which included the Japanese, Jews, Koreans, Mongolians, Manchurians

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<sup>70</sup> <http://www.oomoto.or.jp/English/enFaq/indexfaq.html> retrieved December 2013. The site has since been updated and this paragraph removed.

<sup>71</sup> Shem, Ham and Japheth as rendered in Japanese by Onisaburo.



and Caucasians, were God's chosen people. The *Hamu* included the Chinese, Indians and other Asian and European peoples, while the *Yahetto* were black Africans. Onisaburo also acknowledged, however, the extensive mixing of the three groups throughout history. In this way, he attempted to tie the Japanese people to the Jewish idea of "chosen people", while also undermining the validity of strictly race-based prejudice, as all peoples were mixed to some degree (Stalker, 2008). We will return to the idea of a special role for Japan in our discussion of Oomoto as model, as well as in Chapter IV.

Perhaps one of the most visible and characteristic nativist aspects of present day Oomoto, however, is the focus on and promotion of Japanese traditional arts. Yet, this aspect has its roots not in founder Deguchi Nao – whose austere character and outlook had no use for "elitist" pursuits such as the arts, which, in her mind, only distracted from the divine plan of reconstruction of the world – but in co-founder Onisaburo, who, as noted earlier, demonstrated from an early age a strong passion and natural ability for the arts, a passion he would pursue throughout his life, and one that would intensify in the last years of his life as he dedicated himself fully to his ceramics. It is perhaps his artistic sensibilities that underpinned all his other activities:

It is impossible to understand this flamboyant and baffling man, this bundle of contradictions: genius and madman, contemplative and entrepreneur, artist and activist, radical and conservative, patriot and cosmopolitan pacifist, unless one sees him as the very prototype of the artist, and especially as the man in whom the religious seer and the artist are inextricably interwoven (Franck, 1975, p. 37).

Onisaburo's religious view of art and artistic view of religion was affirmed in the post-war period under Third Spiritual Leader Naohi's leadership, and reaffirmed under each following Spiritual Leader, who devote much of their time to Japanese traditional arts. Oomoto believers are encouraged to follow the Spiritual Leader's example by studying one or more of the traditional arts, with particular emphasis placed on tea ceremony,

Noh, calligraphy and ink drawing, ceramics, poetry, weaving, martial arts,<sup>72</sup> and others.<sup>73</sup>

The point of practicing these arts is not, however, to become a professional or create masterpieces. Nor is the purpose of art to express oneself, to provoke or to “send a message”. The importance lies in the creative process:

For Oomoto the arts are spiritual disciplines, the very contrary of narcissistic indulgence in that much vaunted “self-expression” which evades the question of what “self” is being so indefatigably expressed. Oomoto sees the practice of an art as a form of meditation, of prayer, as one of the ways towards integration by which man may reach his most central humanness. Far from demanding a forced “originality,” it assumes that only the artist’s authenticity ultimately communicates with the authenticity in others, with the True Self of Man (Franck, 1975, p. 42).

Ironically, though, this particular nativist aspect of Oomoto is actually a major attraction for non-Japanese. In addition to Esperanto and interfaith work, the traditional Japanese arts have been a very successful means of outreach with non-Japanese people. Those non-Japanese with an interest in tea ceremony, Noh, calligraphy, Aikido (photos in Appendix C), etc., often discover Oomoto due to the dedicated cultivation of traditional Japanese arts among its members and the opportunities afforded by Oomoto’s main centers for the study of said arts.

Linda Irving<sup>74</sup>, an American artist I met during my stay at the Oomoto center in Kameoka, is one such case. She first encountered Oomoto over 30 years ago when she attended the Oomoto School of Traditional Japanese Arts,<sup>75</sup> an intensive course (in English) designed to immerse foreigners in the study of a variety of Japanese traditional

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<sup>72</sup> Especially Aikido, as its founder was an Oomoto follower and close associate of Onisaburo.

<sup>73</sup> Though by no means a Japanese traditional art, at times Esperanto finds itself listed alongside other “arts”, as it is one of the recommended subjects of study for Oomoto believers (along with the arts mentioned above).

<sup>74</sup> Actual name changed, as she was not part of the official interview sample, even though she gave full consent.

<sup>75</sup> A one-month seminar held annually from 1976 to 1996.

arts, spiritual principles, and even the art of Shinto liturgy. Since this first experience with Oomoto, Linda has maintained an ongoing relationship with the religion, visiting Kameoka from time to time to study Japanese arts. This ongoing relationship led to her joining Oomoto in 2013.

### 2.1.3 Internationalist elements

In contrast with the Japan-centric aspects outlined above, starting in the 1920s we find a clearly internationalist current taking hold in Oomoto thanks to Onisaburo's growing interest in universalistic themes.

Onisaburo's introduction of Esperanto in 1923<sup>76</sup> is clearly the most unexpected of his internationalist innovations. This language, designed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a neutral international language by a Jewish physician living in the Russian Empire and based on Indo-European word roots and a rationalized grammar, could not be more far-removed from Nao's nativist Oomoto. Nonetheless, even in the *Ofudesaki* Onisaburo saw the introduction of Esperanto to Oomoto foretold: "Through the 48 letters of *iroha*<sup>77</sup> I will completely renew the world" (Deguchi Nao, 1999; translated from Esperanto by J. Amis). For Onisaburo, this meant that God would renew the world using a simple language – for him, that language was to be Esperanto. And as confirmation of Esperanto's specific role (as opposed to any neutral, simple language) in Oomoto, Onisaburo specifically mentions Esperanto in the *Reikai Monogatari*.

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<sup>76</sup> Though Onisaburo had developed an interest in Esperanto as early as 1913, a meeting with a Baha'i missionary in 1922 (the Baha'i Faith supported Esperanto as a universal language at the time) convinced him to introduce Esperanto to Oomoto.

<sup>77</sup> "Iroha" refers to the Japanese *hiragana* syllabary – as if to say "ABC".



Esperanto's role in Oomoto has not, however, remained the same over time. In the early years of Esperanto's use in Oomoto, there was a clear sense that Esperanto would serve to spread Oomoto's message abroad. In 1925 the Esperanto language magazine *Oomoto* was launched to bring Oomoto's message to an international public, and the following year an office of Oomoto was founded in Paris to spread Oomoto teachings through Esperanto in Europe, while also promoting Esperanto in general. In the early days of these publications there is little ambiguity as to Oomoto's missionary intentions, as well as Onisaburo's special role. The first issue of *Oomoto* greets the reader with the following declaration:

For 2000 years now there has been the prophecy that Christ will be reborn in this world, and, having saved humanity from the miserable abyss into which it had fallen, He will reign eternally with love and peace. That has remained the belief of all humanity up to the present day. Up to now the signs of the end times have often appeared in the world, but the return of Christ has not yet come to pass. Humanity, dancing upon the volcano of material civilization, is in its death-throws due to ever increasing suffering and insurmountable difficulties. But the Bible never tells falsehood in its prophecies. Truly! The returned Christ has already descended to earth. The divine man, having the nail markings of Christ on both palms<sup>78</sup> and with all the other signs and conditions for the son of Heaven, was born in Tamba, Japan, the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, 1871. His name is Onisaburo Deguchi. He now works every day to show the origin (Oomoto) of world governance, granting true life to all beings (*Oomoto*, Jan. 1925, p. 2; translated from Esperanto by J. Amis).

Along similar lines, in an issue of the same magazine a few years later we find the enumeration of five principals of Oomoto, clearly tailored for an international public: (in summary – my comments in parentheses) 1) Oomoto is a reform movement established by God that aims to reunite religion with politics and soul with body; 2) Oomoto considers that existing religions are the products of the times and places of their founding, but that their ultimate origin and goals are the same; 3) Oomoto liberates from the shackles of divisive creed, and it seeks the realization of a “universal synod”

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<sup>78</sup> This is the only reference to Onisaburo having some sort of “stigmata” that I came across.

(presumably a federation of religions and governments); 4) Oomoto seeks to practice a “world-family” system, that will solve the problems of clothing, food and housing (seemingly a sort of spiritually-based socialism); 5) “Oomoto asserts that Onisaburo Deguchi is God-Man, and definitive Savior of humanity” (*Oomoto*, April 1928; translated from Esperanto by J. Amis).

Notably absent from these early Esperanto Oomoto publications is the apocalyptic and Japan-centric rhetoric of Nao’s revelations. Oomoto teachings are presented in such a way as to be relevant to an international (especially Western) public, with heavy emphasis placed on Onisaburo’s universalistic ideas of global spiritual reform: religious and political unification, egalitarian international communication through Esperanto, a sharing economy, etc., with Oomoto playing a leading role and ultimately leading to the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth.

After the suppression of Oomoto during the Second Oomoto Incident and WWII, with Esperanto publishing activities resuming in 1950, we see a shift of emphasis in Oomoto’s international publications. References to Onisaburo as “Christ” or Savior” practically cease,<sup>79</sup> and the publications take on a markedly less messianic flavor. In the post-war period Oomoto’s international publications focus more on a broad spiritual-humanist message, emphasising themes such as world federalism,<sup>80</sup> nuclear disarmament, interfaith cooperation, Esperanto activism, Japanese arts and culture, ecology and, more recently, bioethics and sustainable agricultural practices. While these themes are certainly in line with Onisaburo’s thinking, the more comprehensive messianic framework and messaging are missing. Whereas the pre-war Oomoto Esperanto publications had the feel of a sort of herald announcing immanent positive

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<sup>79</sup> When the idea of savior is referenced in the post-war period it is usually tied to the theological concept of the Spirit of Mizu (traditionally associated with Onisaburo), rather than the human person of Onisaburo.

<sup>80</sup> The movement (not exclusive to Oomoto) for the creation of a world federation of nations – a more effective and powerful version of the UN. This movement received a great amount of attention in Oomoto in the 1950s and 1960s.

change in the world, the later publications feel more like a window on Oomoto for an international audience: readers can learn about traditional Japanese culture, Oomoto teachings and scriptures, Oomoto's perspective on major current events, etc. – yet one has the impression of being outside peering in, which stands in contrast with the earlier international publications where one has the impression that Oomoto is reaching out.

Based on this evolution in Oomoto's Esperanto publications, we can make the argument for a shift in the role of Esperanto in Oomoto. It seems clear that Onisaburo envisioned an active role for Esperanto, i.e. that Esperanto would ultimately become the one international language of the world and would thus facilitate the realization of the divine plan. In a speech given on November 24, 1923, Onisaburo declared, "I firmly believe that 10 years from now anyone who does not speak Esperanto will be behind the times" (cited in Itoo, Esumi and Nakamura, 1973, p. 75). When this did not happen, and as Oomoto itself lost members due to the Second Oomoto Incident and its membership levelled off in the post-war period, Esperanto, as well as other activities such as interfaith work, took on a more passive role within the concept of "Oomoto as model". We will discuss this concept in detail in the following section.

Nonetheless, Esperanto remains very present in today's Oomoto. Along with Japanese traditional arts, Esperanto is included among the subjects Oomoto believers are encouraged to study as part of their spiritual practice. Major Oomoto centers, as well as many smaller ones, usually hold regular Esperanto courses and study groups, and Esperanto is a mandatory subject for students studying at the Oomoto school<sup>81</sup> in Kameoka. While conversational fluency in Esperanto is rather infrequent among the bulk of Oomoto believers, knowledge of basic expressions and greetings is quite widespread. Among Oomoto employees and officers, however, conversational ability in Esperanto is quite frequent. Also, during every official speech the Fifth Spiritual

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<sup>81</sup> A live-in program at the Oomoto Center in Kameoka, in which students engage in intensive study of Japanese traditional arts, Oomoto theology, doctrine and liturgical technique.



Leader delivers, the introduction and closing are given in Esperanto (with the body of the speech in Japanese).

Oomoto is also a traditional fixture at the annual World Esperanto Congress, held every year in a different city around the world since 1905. Oomoto usually organizes a whole caravan of believers to participate in the Congress and put on a series of programs featuring Oomoto worship, activities and Japanese traditional arts (most typically, tea ceremony and Noh). The Oomoto presentations at the Congress always draw a large crowd, and for many non-Japanese Esperantists the Oomoto presentations are their first and only direct encounters with traditional Japanese culture.

Oomoto also maintains an organization for the promotion of Esperanto. This organization, founded by Onisaburo in 1923 as the Esperanto-Propaganda Asocio (Esperanto Propaganda Association), but re-baptized as the Esperanto-Populariga Asocio (Esperanto Popularization Association) a few years ago, organizes Oomoto's Esperanto educational programs and is one of the larger Esperanto organizations in Japan (after the "neutral" [i.e. unaligned in regards to religion or politics] national Esperanto organization, the Japan Esperanto Institute).

The second major internationalist innovation Onisaburo introduced to Oomoto was that of interfaith cooperation, an idea based in the doctrine of *bankyo-dokon* ("ten thousand teachings, one root" or "all religions spring from the same source"). This doctrine was revealed to Onisaburo during his mystical experience on Mount Takakuma and set down in the *Reikai Monogatari* in January 1922 in a chapter entitled "Bankyo-Dokon".

Richard Fox Young summarizes this account:

Transported to the astral world, he is granted a vision of the *kami*. Solicitous of mankind, they one by one refract themselves, and a part of each (*bunrei*) descends to earth, transformed into one or another of the deities, saints and saviors revered by other religions. The following is a complete list in order of appearance:

Tsuki-teru-hiko-no-kami became the Buddha;  
 Daruma-hiko-no-kami became the first Zen patriarch, Bodhidharma;  
 Sukuna-hiko-no-kami was born in Israel, where, though not explicitly  
 said to have become Jesus Christ, he propagated the “Gospel of the  
 Kingdom of Heaven”;  
 Ama-ji-wake-no-mikoto became Moses;  
 Ame-no-ma-michi-hiko-no-mikoto became Elijah;  
 Takami-musubi-no-kami became Dainichi-nyorai;  
 Toyo-kuni-hime-no-mikoto became the Bodhisattva Jizo;  
 Hiro-yasu-hiko-no-kami became Confucius;  
 No-dachi-hiko-no-mikoto, whom the Buddhists call Lord Yama,  
 divided off a portion of his spirit and became Lao-tsu out of concern  
 that the teachings of Confucius were insufficiently spiritual (1988, p.  
 268).

Of course, one may argue that this vision does not clearly point to the one common origin of all religions, but rather suggests that the true forms of divinity are the Shinto *kami*. On the other hand, the vision may be presented in this form because the Shinto *kami* are more suitable to the Japanese cultural context and Onisaburo’s background. This imagery of *kami* morphing into the founders of the world’s religions may also have been a way for Onisaburo to introduce the concept of interfaith cooperation while also placating the more nativist elements among Oomoto believers of the time by suggesting the pre-eminence of the Shinto *kami*, and, by extension Oomoto:

Although *bankyo dokon* implicitly asserted that Oomoto was the root or head religion, with all others subordinate, the concept nevertheless justified the sect’s new effort to create transnational alliances with spiritual groups from other countries. Oomoto successfully built relationships with other new religions, with which it shared a number of characteristics (Stalker, 2008, p. 152).

Onisaburo also taught that, while not specifically mentioned, the doctrine of *bankyo-dokon* is foreshadowed in the *Ofudesaki*. A revelation from 1892 states: “The streams of the valleys flow into a great river. This is God’s plan” (Deguchi Nao, 1999, p. 14; translated from Esperanto by J. Amis), and in 1899: “As I have already told Deguchi Nao in the 25<sup>th</sup> year of Meiji (1892), all Gods and gods derive from the same source

and for that reason the way of all teachings must be of only one thread. Thus, at last all teachings will unite” (Ibid. p. 51). Onisaburo’s role in the interpretation of the *Ofudesaki* must be kept in mind, however.

Though the doctrine of *bankyo-dokon* was established in the early 1920s, and immediately put into practice through the founding of the World Religious Federation<sup>82</sup> in 1924 (Oomoto Foundation, 1997), it was further refined and ultimately put into wider practice in the post-war period. In an issue of the English language publication *Oomoto* (distinct from the Esperanto publication bearing the same name), stress is placed on “unity in diversity”. All religions are one at the *source*, but they are each distinct in their particular manifestations, approach to spirituality and mission in the world. Thus, each religion has its own role to play in the religious economy. The distinguishing characteristics of each religion should be respected, and no follower of any specific religion should slander another’s faith (*Oomoto*, June 1958).

In terms of practical application of *bankyo-dokon*, however, a key impetus was the joint worship experiences between Oomoto and American Episcopalians in the late 1970s (described above in the historical section). For the first time Oomoto moved beyond cooperation with other new religions and Asian religious groups to cooperation with a mainstream Western religious group. More such ties would be established in subsequent years, including, but not limited to, ties with the Roman Catholic Church, Islam,<sup>83</sup> and Tibetan Buddhism.

This beginning of this new active phase of Oomoto’s interfaith activity was heralded as the beginning of a new age of *shusaika*. This term, a neologism coined by Oomoto,

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<sup>82</sup> This federation, however, was mostly made of Japanese and other East-Asian religious groups and other new religions.

<sup>83</sup> Oomoto representatives even made pilgrimage to Mecca in 1991 under the sponsorship of Sheikh Kuftaro, Grand Mufti of Syria and proponent of interfaith dialogue. Due to the Oomoto representatives belief in the doctrine of *bankyo-dokon* they had no reservations in affirming submission to Allah, and thus, after completing a preparatory course in Islam in Damascus, were granted permission to participate in the Hajj with Sheikh Kuftaro (Oomoto Foundation, 1997).



is usually translated as “interreligious cooperation”. The actual sense, however, goes well beyond simple organizational cooperation, and can be best rendered by the similarly concocted English word “interreligionization”, the process of integrating (or, from Oomoto’s point of view, *reintegrating*) the plurality of religions into unity – a process in which Oomoto sees itself as a catalyst (Young, 1988).

The experience of worship exchange with the Episcopalians<sup>84</sup> would lead to the development of a sort of informal approach to interfaith work,<sup>85</sup> which is generally referred to as “sharing sacred space”. This may sometimes mean worshipping together with members of other faiths, or, as was the case with the Episcopalians, exchanging rituals, i.e. Oomoto representatives perform an Oomoto liturgy in the partner religion’s worship space, and, in turn, representatives from the partner religion come to celebrate worship in one of Oomoto’s temples. The Very Reverend James Parks Morton describes his impression of this initial exchange experience with Oomoto:

What happened was truly earth-shattering because there was this Shinto ceremony in the Cathedral. I felt very grateful, but it didn’t hit me on the head until the year later when Kyotaro Deguchi asked me if I would go to Japan and reciprocate. Then the point was driven home to me what this had meant to him. He saw it as the New Age. I saw it as the New Age when he asked me to do *my* thing at *his* house, and that was the moment of truth. He was saying “Worship God your way in my house,” which means, “We’ll be worshipping God together” (The Oomoto Foundation, 1997).

During my field study, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to witness and participate in such a ritual exchange – and, as it happens, the guest religion was Oomoto’s oldest interfaith partner, Taiwanese religion<sup>86</sup> Tao Yuan. As mentioned

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<sup>84</sup> After the exchange experience with Dean Morton and the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, Oomoto organized a similar exchange with Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, following the same basic model as in New York: after performing an Oomoto worship service in Grace Cathedral, Dean Rogers traveled to Japan to celebrate an Episcopal service in the Oomoto temple in Kameoka (The Oomoto Foundation, 1997).

<sup>85</sup> Oomoto does not define a formal, systematic approach to interfaith exchange, however (Saito H.)

<sup>86</sup> Originally based in mainland China, Tao Yuan has been based in Taiwan since the communists came to power.

earlier, in 1923 Onisaburo established a relationship with Tao Yuan, a new religion sharing Onisaburo's spiritualist inclinations – 2013 thus marked the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this relationship (as well as 90 years since the beginning of Oomoto's interfaith activity). To commemorate this event, representatives from Tao Yuan were invited to come to Ayabe for the Autumn Grand Festival, during which a portion of the service was set aside to commemorate the 90-year relationship with Tao Yuan. The following day, the Tao Yuan representatives performed a Tao Yuan liturgy in the Choseiden (the main temple in Ayabe) in which the Oomoto faithful and I participated (photo in Appendix C). The ritual, conducted in Chinese with brief explanatory notes in Japanese, differed greatly from the Shinto-style rituals normally conducted in the Choseiden. Throughout the Tao Yuan service worshippers assume various postures, repeated in sets: standing, to kneeling, to prostration, then back to standing, then repeated. Nonetheless, the assembled worshippers (all Oomoto followers, except for me, my wife, and the Tao Yuan representatives), who ranged in age from teenagers to seniors (70+), all reverently and attentively participated in the physically demanding ritual from start to finish – illustrating the importance for Oomoto believers of showing respect for the other religion and actively participating in the guest religion's rituals.

Though this approach to interfaith work through the sharing of sacred space is an interesting and original one, one cannot help but wonder whether this sort of exchange is as effective as actual dialogue in understanding the Other on a deeper level. Ultimately, though, such intellectual understanding of the doctrines, teachings and perspectives of the other faith may not be the main goal of Oomoto's approach. Like Oomoto's Esperanto activity, Oomoto's interfaith cooperation is best understood through the concept of *model*, which we will discuss in the following section.

Although Esperanto and interfaith work make up the main internationalist attributes of Oomoto's activities – which I have chosen to focus on here due to the relative importance accorded them in Oomoto and their enduring presence in the religion since their introduction in the early 1920s – there are also other areas of international activity,

such as the Jinrui Aizenkai (Universal Love and Brotherhood Association — ULBA) and participation in the World Federalist Movement, anti-nuclear movement, environmentalism, etc. Nonetheless, these various activities and associations are all oriented towards unification of humanity and improvement of life on earth — notions which fall quite naturally in line with the idea of reconstruction of the world announced in Oomoto's founding revelations, as viewed through Onisaburo's universalistic lens.

## 2.2 Key concepts

### 2.2.1 Oomoto as model

Upon visiting the Oomoto Center in Ayabe, visitors come across a small lake, nestled in a garden by one of the temples. In this lake are five curious man-made islets, each featuring a miniature Shinto-style shrine. My guide, Okuwaki Toshiomi, named the islets one by one: Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku, Hokkaido, and Taiwan<sup>87</sup> — the five main islands of Japan in Onisaburo's time. He then added that each islet represents one of the world's continents: Eurasia (= Honshu), Africa (= Kyushu), Australia (= Shikoku), North America (= Hokkaido), and South America (= Taiwan). This lake is no mere landscaping feature, but a concrete illustration of the concept of Japan as model of the world, and Oomoto as model of Japan (as this lake-model of Japan and the world is within the sacred grounds of Oomoto's holy city, Ayabe<sup>88</sup>).

This idea of “model” (*kata*), however, is not limited to mere geographic correspondences. According to this teaching, Oomoto is a microcosm and mirror of

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<sup>87</sup> At the time Onisaburo had the lake built Taiwan was part of Japan.

<sup>88</sup> While not illustrated in the lake-model, Ayabe is believed to correspond to Jerusalem.



Japan, and Japan is a microcosm and mirror of the world (thus, ultimately, Oomoto is the microcosm and mirror of the world)<sup>89</sup>. Therefore, that which occurs within Oomoto on a small scale (both positive and negative events) will ultimately come to pass in the greater world (Nordenstorm, 2002).

Though elaborated and expanded by Onisaburo, the notion of model is alluded to at various times in the *Ofudesaki* – and quite explicitly in this passage:

Look! That which occurs in my Oomoto also comes to pass in the world. Note well the things that happen in Oomoto and when they happen. In this Oomoto I demonstrate the things that later come to pass in the world. At the same time I call Oomoto the mirror of the world, because all world events are mirrored in Oomoto (Deguchi Nao, 1999, p. 75-76; translated from Esperanto by J. Amis).

The most often mentioned illustration of the role of model played by Oomoto is the Second Oomoto Incident, which is believed to have foreshadowed the destruction of Japan during WWII. The striking correspondences between events in the Second Oomoto Incident and events in WWII illustrate why belief in Oomoto as model is so strong: on December 8, 1935, in the early morning, 700 police raided the main Oomoto centers – six years later, on December 8, 1941, also early in the morning, the Japanese Imperial Navy attacked Pearl Harbor; on April 18, 1936 the Japanese government ordered the destruction of all Oomoto buildings in Ayabe and Kameoka – six years later, on April 18, 1942, the U.S. launched its first air raid on Tokyo (the first attack on the Japanese home islands); on September 8, 1945, the Second Oomoto Incident was brought to conclusion after the surrender of Japan – six years later on September 8, 1951, the Treaty of San Francisco was signed, thus formally ending the Pacific War; and finally, Onisaburo was incarcerated for six years and eight months (December 1935 to August 1942) – the same duration as the Allied Occupation of Japan, from August 1945 to April 1952 (Dobrzynski, 2013). A further parallel may be observed as well:

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<sup>89</sup> The concept of model is sometimes taken a step further: Oomoto as the mirror of the spirit world as well (Ago T.).

the rebuilding of Oomoto after the war, followed by a long period of peace and stability, comparable to the rebuilding of Japan after the war, with a period of peace and stability reigning in the country since that time.

Whereas the idea of model has been present in Oomoto doctrine since Nao's revelations, as we have seen, this teaching appears to have become more relevant in the post-war period. Having reaching a high point in membership and public visibility under Onisaburo, the post-war levelling off of membership and the more modest level of external activity that followed made the concept of model a justification for Oomoto's continued existence and activity. As the approach of more direct action practiced under Onisaburo proved less practical, and, as the religion's recent history had demonstrated, potentially risky, the concept of model has allowed Oomoto to continue activities on a more modest scale, in the belief that these activities will ultimately effect change in the world at large. In fact, the concept of model is the justification for much of Oomoto's present activity. The promotion of Esperanto and interfaith cooperation by such a small organization would seem to have a limited impact on the world as a whole. Yet it is by being a model of the ideal world to come that these activities become relevant. If Oomoto embraces Esperanto, the world will eventually embrace Esperanto. If Oomoto promotes religious unity, religious unity will ultimately be realized worldwide. This idea applies not only to big ideas like a neutral international language and religious unity, but to all aspects of life within Oomoto: if Oomoto believers work together in harmony and mutual respect, such qualities will increase in the world; if Oomoto practices sustainable agriculture and cares for the environment, the world will follow. Oomoto aims to be a miniature of the ideal world to come – therefore there is a great sense of responsibility (Nishinaga, A.).

### 2.2.2 The doctrine of Izu-Mizu

As we saw in the presentation of the founders of Oomoto and their respective scriptures, a marked contrast is evident between the two: starkly different personalities and approaches, and writings fundamentally different in tone, style and content – to the point that these two characters appear as polar opposites. This contrast between the two founders, nonetheless, is directly tied into Oomoto teaching through the doctrine of Izu-Mizu.

According to official Oomoto doctrine, at the beginning of the creation of the universe, GOD (Ookunitokotachi or Amenominakanushi) transitioned from an inactive state of pure undifferentiated unity into bipolar functions: positive (anode) and negative (cathode). These poles are also referred to as spirit/matter, or, in a theological sense, the Spirit of Izu and the Spirit of Mizu. Nao is the embodiment of the Spirit of Izu and Onisaburo is the embodiment of the Spirit of Mizu. The functions of the Spirit of Izu are heavenly, spiritual, masculine and paternal, and it is associated with the element of fire. The functions of the Spirit of Mizu are earthly, material, feminine and maternal, and it is associated with the element of water. The Spirit of Izu is most severe, exalted, noble and holy, while the Spirit of Mizu is most beautiful, loving, true, pure and good. All Gods and gods are grouped into those belonging to the system of Izu and those belonging to the system of Mizu (Oomoto, Doctrinal Department, 2008).

The relationship of Izu with Mizu is often illustrated in weaving terms: Izu is the warp and Mizu is the weft. As the warp (on a loom) is vertical and unmoving, so too the Spirit of Izu is constant and unchanging throughout all time, firm and solid. In contrast, as the weft moves freely between the warp when weaving on a loom, so too the Spirit of Mizu, fluid and flexible, freely manifests in the material and spirit worlds, adapting to conditions and circumstances, as needed to accomplish the salvation of beings (Ibid.).



For these reasons, therefore, Oomoto has two founders with distinct roles. Nao, characterized by severity and the embodiment of the Spirit of Izu, is God's prophet on earth to announce and fulfill the divine plan for reconstruction of the world, while Onisaburo, characterized by compassion and the embodiment of the Spirit of Mizu, is charged with the mission of the salvation of beings (Ibid.).

There is a particularly curious aspect of this doctrine that needs clarifying at this point, however. As noted, Izu is associated with masculine qualities, while Mizu is associated with feminine qualities. But it is Nao who embodies the Spirit of Izu, while Onisaburo embodies the Spirit of Mizu. This concept, developed by Onisaburo, is called *henjo nanshi* – the masculine represented in the other sex – and *henjo nyoshi* – the feminine represented in the other sex. This idea of “transformed beings” reflects the respective characters of the founders: Nao, stern, austere and uncompromising, seems more “male” in nature, while Onisaburo, compassionate, tolerant and artistically inclined, seems more “feminine” in nature. Onisaburo was fond of playing up his role, often dressing flamboyantly in gaily colored clothing and even dressing up as female deities for publicity photos (Stalker, 2008).

As mentioned in the section on the role of Esperanto in Oomoto, in earlier international publications Onisaburo (Spirit of Mizu) is often referred to as “Christ” or “Savior”. However, parallels with Christianity and the Bible involving both the Spirit of Mizu (Onisaburo and his *Reikai Monogatari*) and the Spirit of Izu (Nao and her *Ofudesaki*) are drawn in Oomoto's earlier international publications as well (and were sometimes mentioned by respondents in the interview portion of my field study). One such comparison is with the Old and New Testaments: Nao and the *Ofudesaki* correspond to the Old Testament, and Onisaburo and the *Reikai Monogatari* to the New Testament. Another such comparison (more frequently encountered than the Old Testament/New Testament comparison) is that of Nao with John the Baptist and Onisaburo with Jesus (Kobayashi, 1960, cited in *Oomoto*). Nonetheless, the underlying idea is the same: the Spirit of Izu (embodied in Nao) is characterized by severity, prophecy and divine law

(in line with the Hebrew God YHWH, the Jewish prophetic tradition, and the ascetic and austere John the Baptist), while the Spirit of Mizu (embodied in Onisaburo) is characterized by love, compassion and salvation (in line with Jesus Christ and the loving God the Father).

The doctrine of Izu-Mizu is essential to understanding Oomoto as it explains the existence of two equally important founding figures, two equally important sacred scriptures, and two equally important sacred centers, even as the two elements of each pair have distinct and contrasting characters, tones and functions. Yet, given the importance of this concept, can we also explain the nativist-internationalist duality through the doctrine of Izu-Mizu? We will explore this question in greater depth under the section devoted to the hypothesis.

### 2.3 Research questions and hypothesis

#### 2.3.1 Research questions

As we have seen, international and interfaith activity has formed an integral part of Oomoto teaching since the 1920s. Nevertheless, in addition to the overt nativist tendencies apparent in the early days of the movement, certain nativist aspects persist to this day, as we discussed earlier.

For Westerners, these two tendencies seem contradictory. Yet Oomoto followers (and Oomoto as an organization) live with these tensions and manage to present a fairly unified whole. So then, are these tensions actual contradictions? Or could it be that our perception of contradiction between these two tendencies is due more to our own Western resistance to such a stark duality existing in one religion? How, then, does Oomoto, as an organization, manage to reconcile these two tendencies? And, similarly,

how do leaders and employees of Oomoto perceive its universality in light of its fundamentally Japanese character?

### 2.3.2 Hypothesis

Even though the doctrine of Izu-Mizu explains<sup>90</sup> certain dualities well, I had difficulty applying this concept to the internationalist-nativist duality. Then I came across an editorial in *Oomoto Internacia* suggesting that material progress derives from the West, while spiritual progress derives from the East:

The eastern continent is the birthplace of the world's cultures: Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam – they all come from Asia. And for that reason Asians can be proud that they have led all of humanity spiritually, but while they labored for hundreds of years in the invisible realm of the heart, the Europeans accomplished everything in the visible material realm (Nishimura, March 1926, p.1; translated from Esperanto by J. Amis).

In addition, these two avenues of progress merge in Japan, giving Japan a unique place in the divine plan, as both elements, spiritual progress *and* material progress, are necessary to the reconstruction of the world (Nordenstorm, 2002). What is more (keeping in mind the role of Oomoto as microcosm of Japan and the world), Oomoto is seen as a bridge between the two: “Oomoto has appeared as a movement of reconciliation between spiritual and material civilization” (Ibid.). If we view this statement in light of the doctrinal description of the functions of Izu and Mizu, it becomes clear how this doctrine could explain the internationalist-nativist dichotomy:

The Spirit of Izu is the God who fulfills the divine plan throughout the material and spiritual worlds, and who in the material world is mainly concerned with material reform; the Spirit of Mizu is the God who accomplishes salvation throughout the material and spiritual worlds, and

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<sup>90</sup> As duality was present within Oomoto (the duality of the two founders, for example) before this doctrine was defined by Onisaburo, the doctrine of Izu-Mizu seems to be an *a posteriori* doctrine conceived to explain existing dualities, rather than an *a priori* doctrine having the effect of producing dualities.



who in the material world is mainly concerned with moral reform (Oomoto, Doctrinal Department, 2008, p. 53).

By applying this theory of the respective functions of the West and East to the doctrine of Izu-Mizu I arrived at the following hypothesis: **the duality between the internationalist and nativist tendencies in Oomoto is neither a contradiction nor a true tension, but rather naturally belongs to the Izu-Mizu polarity.** This duality is not only completely natural, but, according to the Oomoto world-view, is even a necessary factor for the maintenance of equilibrium, in a similar fashion as the dualities of male-female, matter-spirit, positive-negative, etc.

A primary goal of my thesis, therefore, is to determine whether (and, if so, to what extent) the hypothesis outlined above is shared by the official Oomoto organization and its representatives today, and, if not, how this nativist-internationalist duality is explained and reconciled (if at all). Furthermore, this study will allow me to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the religion's nativist and internationalist elements, what role this duality plays in religious life, and how this duality is experienced.

#### 2.4 Pertinence

Although a small Shinto-based Japanese new religion may not seem relevant to us living in North America, the central theme of my research is quite pertinent to our pluralistic society. For us in Quebec, the tension between openness to the world (immigration, integration with the rest of North America, etc.) and the preservation of Quebec identity (French language and heritage, social values) poses great challenges. Yet the fact that Oomoto, a religion deeply rooted in a society historically inward-looking, can reach out and positively engage other religions and cultures, while still

maintaining its cultural and ethnic distinctness, can perhaps serve as an example for other religions, cultures, societies, or other groups struggling with similar challenges.

On the other hand, this study also has potential pertinence for Oomoto itself. Over the course of my field study it became apparent that Oomoto, like Japan itself (and, truth be told, most mainstream churches in Canada as well), faces a sizable demographic challenge. Though precise current membership statistics are not readily divulged, no one I discussed the matter with pretends that the membership is growing – at best, and most optimistically, the membership is stable. Yet, like the population of Japan as a whole, Oomoto's membership is aging, and retention of children of Oomoto followers remains a major challenge. Budget and staff reductions<sup>91</sup> also suggest a stagnant or declining membership.

I discussed the issue of membership recruitment with Mr. Asai Kiyotaka of Oomoto's Department of Missions (domestic section). At present, his department is mainly focusing on retention and recruitment of family members. Though some new converts come to Oomoto via the website, there is nonetheless no strategic plan at the moment for broad outreach to the general public (that is, beyond family members and friends). In my various contacts with Oomoto believers I frequently encountered second and third generation believers – first generation believers (i.e. those who came to Oomoto on their own, without having come from a family tradition in the faith), fairly infrequently. This demographic portrait of Oomoto more closely resembles that of an inherited religious tradition, rather than the evangelical model that prevailed before WWII. An aging population and low birth rate (in Oomoto as in Japan at-large),

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<sup>91</sup> In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s Oomoto undertook ambitious interfaith projects (caravans of believers traveling to other countries for exchange projects, for example). Now, however, due to budgetary limitations, these projects are of a much smaller scale. As for staff reductions, the International Department serves as an example: this department once had a staff exceeding 20 employees, but now consists of only five (Okuwaki T.).

combined with mostly family-based “evangelism” and little outreach to the world beyond Japan’s borders, does not bode well for the future of Oomoto.

Perhaps, though, if Oomoto could better understand the non-Japanese perception of the faith, i.e. the perception (or misperception) that it is a Japan-centric religion with unreconciled internal contradictions (nativism vs. internationalism) that has little to offer a non-Japanese person, Oomoto could learn to more effectively present itself, its ideals, its perspective – in short, more effectively tell its story – to an international public, thus reaching a wider audience of potential members.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY AND FIELD EXPERIENCE

#### 3.1 Overview and venue

As the objective of this thesis is the study of nationalist/nativist and internationalist aspects of Oomoto, and, more specifically, testing the hypothesis that the doctrine of Izu-Mizu may explain that duality, and also given the relative paucity of published works available on the subject, I decided that a field study at the Oomoto main religious center would be an appropriate venue for this study. Therefore, the centerpiece of my research is a qualitative<sup>92</sup> field study conducted during a two-month stay in Japan (October and November 2013), the majority of which was spent living at Oomoto's main religious center and headquarters in Kameoka, Japan, a small city of 93,000 people, adjacent to the city of Kyoto. The Oomoto Center in Kameoka, officially named Ten'on-kyo, is, as mentioned previously, one of Oomoto's two main religious centers, and the religion's center for missions and administration. As most of the organization's day-to-day administration and educational activities occur here, the vast majority of Oomoto's professional staff is based in Kameoka. Ten'on-kyo is also home to Oomoto's main library and archives. For these reasons, the Kameoka Center was the ideal base for my field study.

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<sup>92</sup> "Le terme de recherche qualitative est un terme générique qui désigne l'étude des phénomènes sociaux dans leur contexte ordinaire, habituel, pour ne pas dire naturel (...) elle vise d'abord à faire éclore des données nouvelles et à les traiter qualitativement au lieu de les soumettre à l'épreuve de la statistique (...) elle permet une adaptation constante du plan de recherche au fur et à mesure que les données s'amoncellent" (Deslauriers, 1982, cited by Lefrançois in Deslauriers 1988).

I also visited the Oomoto Center in Ayabe several times over the course of the field study. This center, officially called Baisho-en, is home to Oomoto's principal temple (photo in Appendix C) and is the religion's spiritual center for worship and festivals. My visits to the Ayabe Center were mostly tied to religious events (the Autumn Grand Festival, for example, attended mostly by Japanese Oomoto followers, however, with some Western visitors, such as ourselves and a few others) or to teach Esperanto classes (attended by local Japanese Oomoto members). I also visited the Tokyo Center, the third in importance after Ayabe and Kameoka, as well as various regional centers.

As noted by Amit, the researcher plays a crucial role in constructing the field, which opens up a multiplicity of possibilities – for example, long and short visits, face-to-face and electronic interactions, through participant observation, interviews, documents, websites, media material, etc. (Amit, 2000). My field study consisted of the three following elements (in order of importance): 1) interviews, 2) archival research, and 3) participant observation. Before undertaking the field study, I read materials from the Oomoto website and exchanged a number of emails with Oomoto staff members, in order to become more familiar with certain aspects of the religion (notably the organizational structure) and to make additional personal contacts with people within the Oomoto organization.

The field study stay was, in fact, my second visit to the Oomoto headquarters in recent years (i.e. in addition to my first contacts with the religion while I lived in Japan from 2000 to 2002). During my previous visit to the Oomoto Center in 2012 (during a vacation in Japan), I collected newsletters, flyers, brochures and other literature from Oomoto which aided in my preliminary research.

### 3.2 Ethical considerations

As the project involves research with human beings, the field study was carried out in accordance with the CERPÉ (Faculté des sciences humaines, UQÀM) standards and following the specifications outlined in the my *demande d'approbation éthique* (certificate number FSH-2013-67).

Due to the fact that interview subjects were selected from among leaders, employees and others with a high level of official engagement with the organization, and the fact that the subjects covered in the interviews were not personal or sensitive in nature, ethical concerns were minimal. Nonetheless, explicit written permission was obtained from interview participants as to use of their name, title and direct quotations in the final thesis, and they were briefed on the nature of my research project and UQÀM's research ethics standards (also provided in writing, in Esperanto and English).

As to the participant observation aspect, all observation was participatory in nature, i.e. there was no simple observation. No video or audio recording<sup>93</sup> was used, except in the case of major public rituals (in which case official permission was obtained<sup>94</sup>). All interview subjects whose names appear in this work are Japanese followers of Oomoto who are highly engaged with Oomoto activities (employees, leaders and volunteers). In addition, I interviewed two Westerners (Americans), long-term friends of Oomoto who were visiting the Kameoka Center at the time of the study, passionate for Japanese arts and culture. They gave their written permission to be interviewed, but since they were not part of the official interview sample, their names were changed for anonymity.

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<sup>93</sup> Audio recording was only used for the interview portion. Permission to record the session was obtained beforehand.

<sup>94</sup> I was advised that any ceremony could be photographed or filmed *except* during portions when the Spiritual Leader was speaking or officiating.



### 3.3 Archival research

Oomoto's headquarters in Kameoka is home to Oomoto's main library and archives (photo in Appendix C), available to both researchers and the general public. The library is home to numerous books, magazines, newspapers, research papers and collateral material (brochures, flyers, etc.), most not readily available elsewhere. Most materials are in Japanese, but a significant number of materials is also available in English, Esperanto, with some materials in German, Portuguese and other languages. The most rare and fragile publications are stored in a special archive building designed for the preservation of such documents, where consistent temperature and humidity are maintained throughout the year. Researchers may access specific documents from this collection on request, though browsing is not allowed due to the condition of the documents.

The first portion of the field study was dedicated to research in the library and archives. The main objectives of the archival research were the following:

- 1) Noting how earlier publications addressed:
  - a. nativist aspects of Oomoto;
  - b. internationalist aspects of Oomoto (particularly the role of Esperanto and interfaith activity);
  - c. Doctrine of Izu-Mizu;
  - d. Oomoto in a non-Japanese context and recruitment abroad
- 2) Noting changes in tone or emphasis over time in regards to the issues above;
- 3) Preparation for the interview portion to follow.

The archival research portion focused primarily on Oomoto's international periodicals dating back to the beginning of the religion's international activity in the mid-1920s: *Oomoto* (Esperanto-language magazine, 1920s to present, with interruption during the

Second Oomoto Incident), *Oomoto* (English-language magazine, 1950s to 1980s), and *Oomoto Internacia* (Esperanto-language magazine, 1920s and 1930s). In addition to these periodical collections, I was also able to access a variety of other publications not readily available elsewhere, including a rare copy of *Oomoto Internacia* from the 1920s (and not available in bound copy in the library), available only in the conservation archive building.

The above mentioned magazines are bound and categorized, which facilitated the study. Firstly, I read through article titles and subheadings, and if the titles or subheadings suggested possible relevance to the topics of the study, I proceeded to a more detailed study of the article. If the article was in line with the topic of interest, I read the articles (either selectively, giving particular attention to paragraphs of interest, or in full, if preliminary skimming suggested that the article was pertinent enough to warrant detailed reading). In addition, all articles of interest (and bibliographic information) were photographed (due to the added expense, wasted paper and sheer weight of such a large number of photocopies) for further reference upon returning home (the articles of greatest interest and pertinence were coded as such, to distinguish them from other articles and to facilitate their study).

Several books were purchased during the course of my stay, and pages in the books that were not available for purchase, but nevertheless of interest for the study, were photographed. Overall, 426 photos of documents (mostly, with photographs of two-page spreads of periodical pages) were retained for further study.

This archival research allowed me to follow the evolution of Oomoto doctrine as presented to the outside world, observe the shift in missionary emphasis/non-emphasis, compare and contrast former emphases with current ones, and study the ways in which the nativist-internationalist duality was approached and how the doctrine of Izu-Mizu was presented.

### 3.4 Interviews

The interviews constituted the main body of qualitative material used in the study. As the subject of my research is linked to the official position of Oomoto in regards to Izu-Mizu duality, I decided to limit the interviews to leaders and employees of Oomoto, and *not* use a larger sample of simple Oomoto followers (which could also put them in a difficult psychological situation due to the intimidation/pressure of being interviewed by a foreigner about complex issues in their religion). By limiting my interview subjects primarily to leaders (current or past) and employees<sup>95</sup> of the organization, I was able to form a clearer picture of Oomoto's official teachings and viewpoints (especially concerning the nativist-internationalist duality and the doctrine of Izu-Mizu) as expressed by individuals with a high degree of knowledge about and commitment to the organization. It is worth noting, however, that Oomoto officials in no way prevented me from interviewing people not occupying an official function in the organization. The reason for limiting the interview portion to leaders, employees and others with a high level of engagement in the organization was not due to limitations imposed by the Oomoto organization, but rather because the scope of the study was intentionally limited to this group in order to determine the point of view of those actively engaged in the organization.

In addition to Oomoto officials, there was one subject that was not an employee of Oomoto, but who was nevertheless highly engaged in various Oomoto projects on a volunteer basis. Also, I interviewed an American couple who had recently joined

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<sup>95</sup> Limiting the sample thusly also helped avoid the complications associated with interviewing ordinary believers in a Japanese cultural context. Among these complications are: 1) language — the ordinary Oomoto believer is much less likely to speak Esperanto or English (thus requiring an interpreter) than is an Oomoto leader or employee; 2) culture — the intimidation of being interviewed by a foreigner about a sensitive issue would likely yield unreliable responses (whereas Oomoto officials are accustomed to routine interaction with foreigners; 3) commitment/knowledge — it is difficult to determine the level of a believer's commitment to the religion (as affiliation with more than one religious group is common in Japan), and whether his/her knowledge of Oomoto's doctrine is reliable (due to influence from folk beliefs, teachings from other religions, etc.).



Oomoto<sup>96</sup>. Overall, 13 interviews<sup>97</sup> were conducted, among which five in English, five in Esperanto, and three in Japanese with translation into Esperanto by Okuwaki Toshiomi, fully proficient in Esperanto. The length of the interviews varied between one and 1.5 hours. The interviews were structured as semi-guided interviews, based on the interview guide (Appendix A), but with the possibility of elaboration of topics in the subject's area of expertise and follow-up based on the subject's responses. All questions were directly related to the topics of the study. The main objectives of the interview were to determine the subjects' perspectives on the:

- 1) Role of Esperanto and interfaith activity (primary internationalist aspects)
- 2) Role of Japanese language, culture, Shinto ritual and Japanese people/nation
- 3) Role of proselytism, Oomoto in non-Japanese context, and Oomoto as a universal religion.
- 4) Role of duality and the doctrine of Izu-Mizu

All interviews were recorded by MP3 voice recorder, with the explicit consent of each subject. Interviews were transcribed verbatim in real time during the interview sessions by my wife Yevgeniya Amis, trained in interview transcription and with many years of experience in journalism and editing. Yevgeniya is a M.Sc. student in Marketing, market analyst by current profession, fluent speaker of Esperanto and English and former journalist and editor (including five years of experience as editor-in-chief of an international Esperanto-language publication, *Kontakto*, magazine of the World Youth Esperanto Organization). After each interview I reviewed the transcript while listening to the recording to ensure accuracy of the transcription and correct any errors. Transcripts were subsequently coded by subject (nativist elements, internationalist elements, Oomoto as universal religion, etc.) for comparison and analysis.

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<sup>96</sup> This interview was not expected or planned, and these participants did not fit the profile of other subjects in the study. Nevertheless, as the opportunity presented itself and the couple was willing to be interviewed, I took advantage of the opportunity to hear the views of non-Japanese Oomoto members.

<sup>97</sup> The American couple were interviewed together, counting as one interview.

Most of the interviews were conducted at the Oomoto Center in Kameoka in person. The interviews were conducted either directly in Esperanto, when the subject's proficiency was sufficient, in Japanese with an Esperanto-speaking interpreter, or directly in English. Subjects who preferred the help of an interpreter preferred this option because they felt their ability in Esperanto was not sufficient to express the nuances needed to properly answer my questions. Nonetheless, it was clear that these respondents had passive knowledge of Esperanto because they would often begin answering the question before the interpreter had translated it. Due to the potential for misunderstanding of key terms such as "nativist", "nationalist", etc., great care was taken to convey the correct sense of the terms. This was done by referring to the terms both in Esperanto and English (as all subjects interviewed in English – with the exception of the American couple mentioned below – were conversant in Esperanto as well, even if they felt English to be their stronger foreign language), providing additional explanation, and, in the case of interviews conducted in Japanese through an interpreter, thoroughly briefing the interpreter on the intended meaning of the terms beforehand. The subjects were chosen among the leaders and employees of the organization's departments, including the International Department, the Doctrinal Department, the Missions Department, the Administrative Department, and some smaller departments. Mr. Okuwaki Toshiomi, my liaison during the stay, helped me to identify and contact interview subjects. With the exception of one interview with an American couple (two new Oomoto members), all subjects were native Japanese, born in Japan, many of whom were at least second generation Oomoto followers (meaning their parents had been members as well) – a common phenomenon among the Oomoto followers I encountered during the stay (first generation followers were far more rare). The criteria for selection of subjects were their subject matter expertise (for example, leaders of sections or departments were preferred over simple employees), as well as availability and a willingness to be interviewed for the study.

The departmental layout referred to above does require some explanation, however. I found that there is quite a bit of overlap among departments, and within departments there are various functions, though not always clearly defined. Many of the subjects did not have clearly defined titles, other than, for example, "member of the International Department". I also learned that employees are moved from one department to another fairly frequently. For example, my liaison Mr. Okuwaki was then a member of the International Department, but had previously worked in the Doctrinal Department, so he is thoroughly familiar with both. The purpose of such reshuffling, as I understood, is to give employees a wide range of experience within the organization, while encouraging cohesiveness throughout the organization. Therefore, one should not assume that the Doctrinal Department is made up of career theologians, for example.

### 3.5 Participant observation

While not central to my research (which aims to determine the perspective of those with a high degree of engagement in the religion, as opposed to the views of regular members), the third part of my field work was participant observation. As participant-observer, I participated in a number of events, assisted in teaching Esperanto classes, and was otherwise involved in the everyday life of the Oomoto Center (while for some events, such as festivals, we were not the only Westerners, most everyday interaction was with Japanese followers of Oomoto, with only sporadic presence of other Westerners). The informal conversations during the course of the stay took place sometimes in Esperanto, sometimes in English, and sometimes in (simple) Japanese (having lived for two years in Japan, I was able to converse at a basic-intermediate level). The informal conversations were *not* recorded in any way, however, I kept a



journal to note pertinent exchanges. Special attention was given to events (observations) that revolved around the themes of my research.

The main objectives of the participant observation portion were to:

- 1) Gain a greater familiarity and overall understanding of my research object;
- 2) Help me to situate my research within the greater context of Oomoto spirituality and practice;
- 3) Experience both internationalist and nativist aspects of Oomoto in the everyday life at the Oomoto Centers.

The participant observation took place throughout my stay as I stayed in guest housing within the Oomoto Center in Kameoka, providing ample opportunity for interaction with staff, volunteers and other guests. In fact, the Oomoto Center in Kameoka plays a dual role: on the one hand, it is the administrative headquarters of the religion, and on the other hand, it is also a retreat center for Oomoto believers, who may come at any time for a period of spiritual retreat and/or study. The Oomoto Center provides guest housing for retreat participants and other visitors (such as students of the arts and researchers) and a cafeteria that serves both Oomoto staff and visitors.

The main building of the Kameoka Center (photo in Appendix C) is a new building, completed in 2010, equipped with modern conveniences, while retaining the feel of traditional Japanese architecture and certain traditional Japanese features, such as rooms with *tatami* flooring and *fusuma* sliding doors. The temple buildings in both Kameoka and Ayabe were built using traditional Japanese techniques and materials (the principal temple in Ayabe, for example, was built entirely without the use of nails). It is interesting to note that signage (indicating various facilities, washrooms, baths, cafeteria, etc.) in the buildings at both of Oomoto's main centers (Kameoka and Ayabe) are in Japanese *and* in Esperanto (no English – a contrast with signage in most public spaces in Japan, where, when there is a second language at all, it is invariably English). The official motto of Oomoto: *Unu Dio, Unu Mondo, Unu Interlingvo* (“One God, One

World , One Interlanguage”) is carved on a large stone monument beside the main building (photo in Appendix C). In addition, in front of the entrance of the main building in Kameoka three flags are flown side by side: the flag of Oomoto, the flag of the Universal Love and Brotherhood Association and the Esperanto flag, further emphasising the importance of Esperanto in Oomoto.

It is worth noting that I took most of my meals with the Oomoto staff, visitors, and retreat participants in the Oomoto cafeteria (the meals provided were almost exclusively traditional, and simple, Japanese food, with practically no meat other than fish and sea foods). Sharing meals was a great way to become acquainted with Oomoto staff, volunteers and visiting members and ask questions in an informal setting.

I also took part in daily morning and evening prayer in the temple, and experienced other aspects of religious life such as traditional arts and Esperanto study. As training in Japanese traditional arts occurs on an ongoing basis at the Oomoto Center, there were ample opportunities to experience this key component of Oomoto’s nativist aspect, including tea ceremony (greatly emphasised and respected in Oomoto), traditional liturgical music, Noh, calligraphy, martial arts, etc.

### 3.6 Summary of field experience

My stay at Oomoto offered a unique opportunity to familiarize myself with both the nativist and internationalist aspects of Oomoto: through archival research, I was able to acquaint myself with Oomoto periodicals directed towards an international public, noting shifts in tone and emphasis in the way Oomoto has been presented to the non-Japanese public throughout the religion’s history. Through interviews and interaction with the various departments of Oomoto, I was able to have a more complete picture of the organization’s perspectives on the faith’s nativist and internationalist aspects,

and by participating in various activities and observing Oomoto's practice of traditional Japanese arts, I was able to better appreciate how deeply Oomoto is engaged in preserving, valuing and showcasing traditional Japanese arts (e.g., tea ceremony, traditional pottery, martial arts, Noh, etc.), and music (e.g., the use of the ancient *koto* instrument, not typically used in contemporary Shinto and rarely encountered in modern Japan, but highly valued in Oomoto and used in all its liturgies).

My field study was set up through and hosted by Oomoto's International Department, the department responsible for all visiting foreigners, whether they be academic researchers, writers, artists, religious representatives or other dignitaries. Mr. Okuwaki Toshiomi of the International Department facilitated the setup of my stay and served as my liaison throughout the study. This arrangement is simply due to the way the organization is structured: the budget and paperwork for visitors from abroad is delegated to the International Department. That said, the International Department in no way interfered with or circumscribed my interactions with other people. The International Department only intervened when I requested help or when my presence was requested at a certain event or activity. My wife, Yevgeniya Amis, also accompanied me during the study and assisted me with many practical aspects of the research (such as transcription, mentioned above, and photographing archival materials; she did not ask questions or make comments during the interviews, but she did assist with ice-breakers and informal conversation).

The host organization was quite accommodating and eager to facilitate my work to the degree possible. In typically Japanese fashion, the experience was very well organized and orderly: I was provided with a printed schedule (made especially for us) of activities we would be expected to participate in so that I could better plan my other research activities around these events.



The earlier part of the field experience was mostly focused on archival research as I thought having a more complete historical picture of Oomoto's international activities (provided by study of the above-mentioned periodicals) before beginning the interviews would make for a more fruitful dialogue with the interview subjects. Interviews were worked into the schedule a bit later on in the study, at the subjects' convenience.

As guests of the Oomoto Center, we were asked to "work" a bit during the stay: my wife and I were asked to assist in teaching Esperanto classes (photo in Appendix C) at the Oomoto Center in Kameoka, as well as in Ayabe and other centers in neighboring cities (of course, this was not "work" from my perspective, but rather a pleasure). Class groups ranged from young students at the Oomoto School to adult classes (some specifically for Oomoto employees, with the rest being for local members) with a wide range of age groups represented. In talking with participants in these classes I learned that they practically all practice at least one other art (remembering that Esperanto is grouped in with the activities Oomoto encourages, the majority of which are traditional arts), and many of them practice several. I received the clear impression from them, nonetheless, that Esperanto is not just a hobby, but an activity on par with the other arts practiced by Oomoto believers.

In the week leading up to the Autumn Grand Festival, the International Department held an English-language workshop on Oomoto for foreigners, a workshop held from time to time. In addition to my wife and I and an Esperantist from the UK (originally from Poland), a group of Christian students from Germany and Switzerland studying Japanese religions at the University of Kyoto participated. The workshop covered a wide range of topics: Oomoto history, teachings and activities (including, but not limited to international activities), Esperanto, Chinkon meditational technique (practical workshop) and Ro-ei poem chanting technique (practical workshop). Unsurprisingly, the tone of the presentations was purely informational, without the

least hint of proselytism. Emphasis was placed on participation, with attendees expected to participate<sup>98</sup> in morning and evening prayer, including morning temple cleaning. A highlight of this workshop was the pilgrimage up Mount Takakuma, where Onisaburo spent his week of asceticism in February 1898. Upon reaching the “cave” where Onisaburo spent the week, I recall being impressed by its small size – more like a hollow in the mountainside than a cave – and could not imagine spending a week there in late winter. There our guide led us in prayer and then had us read English translations of excerpts from the *Reikai Monogatari* in turn.

The workshop culminated with the Autumn Grand Festival in Ayabe where, as mentioned in the section on ritual and ceremonies, I was invited to participate in *tamagushi hoten*, i.e. the offering of a sacred pine branch at the high altar. The Grand Festival assembled a large number of Oomoto followers, filling the main worship hall to capacity, with overflow to several other adjacent halls (in my estimate, at least 3000 people). Other than being on a much larger scale, the service followed the basic liturgical format of the *Tsukinamisai* (described in detail in the section on ritual and ceremonies). The pageantry of the Shinto liturgy, carried out with painstaking precision, on display during all Oomoto rituals, but especially during the Grand Festivals, is a powerful reminder of the central role of Shinto ritual in Oomoto as it is currently practiced.

Other highlights included participation in Oomoto events during the annual Japan Esperanto Congress in Tokyo, accompanied by a visit to the Tokyo Oomoto Center,

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<sup>98</sup> Though most of the workshop attendees participated fully in the rituals, I observed that a couple of the Christian students refused to participate in the prayers (which was easily noticeable, because Oomoto prayer is done aloud and in unison, and begins and ends with a series of bows). I later asked some Oomoto believers what they thought of this behavior, and most found it to be “strange” and incomprehensible, as Oomoto believers always fully participate when invited to attend the rituals of other religions.

visits to Izumo Grand Shrine,<sup>99</sup> along with the Izumo Oomoto Center, and other Shinto sacred sites<sup>100</sup> with significance for Oomoto (with commentary), a stay at the Takeda Betsuin, a site with historical importance related to the Second Oomoto Incident,<sup>101</sup> singing with the Oomoto chorus,<sup>102</sup> and learning about traditional arts (especially tea ceremony, Noh drama and calligraphy) and Oomoto-supported martial arts, namely Aikido and Waraku.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> The second most important Shinto shrine in Japan, located in Shimane Prefecture, with a special significance for Oomoto: Deguchi Nao made a pilgrimage to this shrine to obtain sacred fire (Oishi, 1982).

<sup>100</sup> Among these was the Shinto shrine Moto-Ise ("source of Ise") in the Northern part of Kyoto prefecture, one of many shrines popularly believed to be the original location of Ise Grand Shrine (hence the name "source of Ise"), the most sacred shrine in Shinto (as it is dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu). In similar fashion as Nao brought sacred fire from Izumo, Nao travelled to this shrine to obtain sacred water from a spring there. Fire is associated with the Spirit of Izu, and water with the Spirit of Mizu (Oishi, 1982).

<sup>101</sup> The Takeda Betsuin, now an Oomoto Center, is a historic farmhouse where Onisaburo's daughter Naohi (later to become the Third Spiritual Leader) and her husband Deguchi Hidemaru (suffering from mental illness brought on by torture at the hands of police) were sheltered during the persecutions of the Second Oomoto Incident (Tsumoto M.).

<sup>102</sup> An unplanned occurrence that nonetheless illustrates an episode of "integration" in the community. The Oomoto chorus (made up of mostly of Kameoka Oomoto staff and nearby believers) was rehearsing a song in Esperanto and invited us to sing with them. We ended up rehearsing with them for several weeks and performed (presenting a song in Esperanto and also one in Japanese) at an Oomoto-run nursing home in Kameoka, with the Fifth Spiritual Leader in attendance.

<sup>103</sup> Waraku is a newer martial art founded by Oomoto believer Maeda Hiramasa Shihan (who still teaches classes in Kameoka), that incorporates meditation, sacred vowel sounds (according to the principal of *kotodama*) and the use of bamboo swords.



## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

*Note: interview subjects' names, roles in Oomoto and the language their interview was conducted in are listed in Appendix B. All translations from Esperanto (whether the subject's original words in Esperanto or the interpreter's Esperanto translation of the subject's original Japanese words) into English are mine.*

#### 4.1 Role of Esperanto

As we saw in section 2.1.2, Esperanto has played an important role in Oomoto since Onisaburo adopted the language for Oomoto in 1923. Nonetheless, as I studied issues of Oomoto's international publications dating back to the mid-1920s, I perceived a shift in emphasis from a quite missionary and expansionist tone in the pre-WWII period, to a more reserved tone in the post-WWII period. In the earlier period of Esperanto activity in Oomoto, while Onisaburo was still alive, I had the distinct impression, based on the periodicals and the existence of the Oomoto International Office in Paris during this period, that Onisaburo intended for Esperanto to be a practical tool to promote Oomoto (in the universalistic sense he conceived it) abroad. My interactions with today's Oomoto, however, suggest a different role for Esperanto: to inform about (rather than to spread) Oomoto abroad and promote mutual understanding through a neutral common language (which is the goal of basically all Esperanto organizations). Conversations with interview subjects, however, revealed that my perception of a clear shift in emphasis of the role of Esperanto was not widely shared.

Before getting into the evolution of the role of Esperanto in Oomoto, I shall first discuss the subjects' perceptions of Esperanto's role in Oomoto in general. I asked subjects to give their opinion as to the role and importance of Esperanto in Oomoto. All subjects, without exception and regardless of their level of competence in Esperanto, were quick to emphasize the fundamental importance of Esperanto in Oomoto. Nonetheless, there was more variance in perceptions of the role of Esperanto, though these perceptions tended to point in the same general direction: realisation of peace and brotherhood on earth.

Responses to this first question ranged from more doctrinal understandings – as exemplified by Mr. Yamada Uta's<sup>104</sup> assertion that “Esperanto is a gift from God. Oomoto aims to bring peace to the whole world, and Esperanto has and will have an important role in that work. Deguchi Onisaburo taught us this, and therefore we Oomoto followers believe it to be true” – to more humanistic understandings – as illustrated by Mr. Nishinaga Atsushi's<sup>105</sup> statement that “Esperanto itself has a special character. In using this language one can feel not like a member of a specific national group, but human; not Japanese, English or Chinese, but human. To spread Esperanto is, in itself, to realize the ideal of our humanity.” Most responses, though, emphasised a combination of a practical role (for informing about Oomoto abroad, communicating with other peoples on a neutral basis, etc.) and idealistic role of Esperanto in Oomoto.

As to the idealistic role of Esperanto in Oomoto, several subjects made specific mention of similarities between Onisaburo's universalistic ideals and Zamenhof's *homaranismo*.<sup>106</sup> Dr. Zamenhof, creator of Esperanto, also had hopes for a universal neutral religion, in addition to a neutral second language. This religion would not be based on specific dogma or supernatural beliefs, but would serve as a common religion

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<sup>104</sup> Director of Interfaith Activities and Communications, Administrative Department.

<sup>105</sup> Special projects, currently working on compilation of a book on the 120-year history of Oomoto.

<sup>106</sup> “Hom-ar-an-ismo” roughly translates as “the religion/philosophy [or just “ism”] of membership in the human race.

of humanity, without replacing existing religions, nor forcing supernatural doctrines on the irreligious (basically the same concept as Esperanto applied to religion).<sup>107</sup> Onisaburo, then, recognized his own broad spiritual views in Zamenhof's *homaranismo*, which was influential in his decision to introduce Esperanto to Oomoto. Mr. Ago Takashi<sup>108</sup> went even so far as to claim that Onisaburo's thought and Zamenhof's *homaranismo* are in complete agreement. While this assertion side-steps differences in the underlying philosophical assumptions of the two – Onisaburo's universalism being based on the idea of a common divine source of all religions (*bankyo-dokon*), while Zamenhof's *homaranismo* made no claims with regards to the divine, choosing to focus on humanistic themes – in saying this Ago was referring to the broad aims of the two currents of thought: unity among religions, while maintaining religious diversity.

I subsequently asked subjects the following:

Has the role of Esperanto changed since its introduction in the early 1920s? It seems to me that originally Oomoto used Esperanto to recruit members abroad, however today it seems that Oomoto doesn't actively recruit foreign members. How do you see the evolution of the role of Esperanto in Oomoto from its introduction to today?

At my suggestion that the role of Esperanto in Oomoto had changed since Onisaburo's time, some subjects appeared uneasy. After some reflection, however, the majority of subjects concluded that the role of Esperanto in the religion had not substantially changed, though, due to historical circumstances, the level of activity using Esperanto had fluctuated. Of the majority that thought the role of Esperanto had not substantially changed, most felt that Oomoto had always tried to inform about Oomoto teaching to an international public, with the hope of gaining members abroad, or at least

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<sup>107</sup> *Homaranismo* as envisioned by Zamenhof (as it was never put into practice in any significant way) bears strong resemblance to religious humanism, or even modern Unitarian Universalism.

<sup>108</sup> Director of the International Department.



sympathizers – and this is still the case. Mr. Inagaki<sup>109</sup> and Mr. Yamada, though, added that recruitment of Oomoto members abroad has never been the primary role of Esperanto, but rather promotion of peace, harmony and interfaith cooperation.

Comments by Mr. Agoo and Mr. Hazama Hiroto<sup>110</sup> (both providing similar variations of the same basic idea) offer a possible explanation for the seeming shift in the use of Esperanto to recruit members abroad: while recruitment for Oomoto abroad using Esperanto was attempted in the pre-WWII era, this effort met with little success. It was hoped that new members abroad could be recruited this way, but, as Oomoto also did not want to impose itself upon members of other faiths (due to the teaching of *bankyo-dokon*) and perhaps due to the Japanese character of Oomoto (its rituals, origins and cultural context), recruiting non-Japanese members abroad proved extremely difficult. Thus, in later years emphasis was placed on informing and explaining about Oomoto, rather than directly attempting to recruit on a large scale.

On the other hand, a slightly different perspective was offered by Mr. Tanaka Masamichi,<sup>111</sup> according to whom the goal, even in the early days, of Oomoto's international activity, was not to convert people outside of Japan to Oomoto, but rather to build an international network of people of faith and goodwill connected to Oomoto. Converts were, and are, most welcome, but not sought out, in his view.

Diverging from the above views according to which the role of Esperanto has not substantially changed, however, Mr. Nishinaga felt that recruitment of members abroad (through Esperanto or other languages) has been emphasized at certain points in Oomoto's history, while at other times this has been de-emphasized, i.e. that

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<sup>109</sup> Vice President of the Jinrui Aizenkai (Universal Love and Brotherhood Association – of which all Oomoto members are automatically members) and President of the Jinrui Aizenkai International (made up mostly of non-member Oomoto sympathizers).

<sup>110</sup> Member of the International Department and board member of the Esperanto-Populariga Asocio de Oomoto.

<sup>111</sup> Special Emissary of the Spiritual Leader (not tied to a specific department, but reports directly to the Spiritual Leader).

conversion of people of other faith backgrounds is not necessary. These emphases have fluctuated from one period to another. In agreement with the other subjects, nonetheless, he added that the *idealistic* role of Esperanto to bring about peace and understanding in the world – both through actual international contacts through Esperanto and through the language's role in the Oomoto concept of model – has remained constant since Onisaburo introduced Esperanto to Oomoto.

Thus, it seems that while the idealistic role of Esperanto in Oomoto has, in the eyes of the interview subjects, remained basically the same, the perception of the language's practical application throughout its history of use in Oomoto is less clear.

#### 4.2 Role of interfaith activity

Like Esperanto, interfaith activity has been a part of Oomoto's work since the early 1920s, when Onisaburo revealed the doctrine of *bankyo-dokon*. As noted earlier, Oomoto's interfaith activity began a particularly active phase in the 1970s with the worship exchanges with American Episcopalians that would lead to other exchanges and contacts with a variety of faith traditions. Interfaith activity gained such prominence that in 1997 Oomoto dedicated an entire English-language publication to this topic, *Bankyo Dokon: Seventy Years of Inter-Religious Activity at Oomoto*. This publication opens with the following unambiguous declaration:

Oomoto is a small religion as measured by the number of its followers, but since its founding in 1892 it has played a role far in excess of its size in influencing inter-religious dialogue in Japan and abroad.

The reasons are to be found in Oomoto's history. For Oomoto, inter-religious work is a central part of its divine mission. Joint worship and exchanges with other religions have not been merely a side business, something which a religion needs to do to keep up harmonious relations with others. According

to the teachings of its founders, inter-religious work is what God created Oomoto to do (The Oomoto Foundation, 1997, p. 2).

Nonetheless, the role of interfaith activity has taken on different forms throughout the history of Oomoto. As mentioned earlier, Onisaburo's earliest major foray into interfaith work was the launching of the World Religious Federation. Though small (made up predominantly of new religions and Japanese religious groups) and relatively short-lived (falling victim to the Second Oomoto Incident and WWII), this first attempt introduced the idea of an organizational approach to interfaith unity. Post-war interfaith efforts did not return to the idea of religious federation, however, with Oomoto instead engaging individual religions (or denominations within religions) directly, most often through joint worship.

The first question I asked subjects on this topic was, "In your opinion, what is the role and importance of interreligious activity in Oomoto?" As to importance, all subjects (not surprisingly) stated that interfaith activity is a very important part of Oomoto's work – many of them going so far as to say that it is essential to Oomoto's very identity. According to Mr. Yamada, "Interfaith activity is important to Oomoto as one's right hand is important to a person".

As to the role of interfaith work, responses tended to be centered on a common theme: putting an end to religious conflict and promote friendship among religions (paralleling the idealistic role of Esperanto: bringing an end to conflict between peoples and promoting friendship among peoples). Such brotherhood among faiths will be brought about not by forcing unity upon religions, but rather by *recognizing* the underlying unity that has always existed (*bankyo-dokon*):

It is necessary that religious people realize that all faiths share a common source. When all people of faith come to this realization, enmity between religions will disappear. This does not mean, however, that religion itself will disappear (Yamada U.).



The idea that failure to recognize the common divine source of all religions is the primary cause of interreligious conflict recurred throughout the responses. One response in this vein even suggests why, perhaps, Oomoto's approach to recruitment is a soft one: "If religions think primarily of their own expansion, conflict is inevitable. Religions must think first of a harmonious, peaceful world" (Okuwaki T.). Thus, Oomoto's own expansion and organizational maintenance is less important than the spread of the ideals Oomoto supports. This is in line with what Onisaburo wrote at the time he founded the World Religious Federation:

As for the world religious unity Oomoto calls for, most people think this means that unless the entire world follows the teachings of Oomoto, we will not have religious unity. But religions differ naturally according to different thoughts and concepts, and when looked at from a larger point of view, it doesn't matter whether they are called Shinto, Buddhist, or Christian. If all religious groups and thinkers act in accordance with Oomoto's hopes, then this will be Oomoto's world unity (cited in *Bankyo Dokon*, The Oomoto Foundation, 1997, p. 6).

With Onisaburo's World Religious Federation in mind, I followed up this question by asking about the ultimate aims of Oomoto's interfaith activity: was the ultimate goal a sort of religious federation, like Onisaburo's, but on a worldwide scale? Responses to this question indicated a lack of consensus on this issue, though the responses diverged in two general directions. Approximately half of the subjects expressed a belief that such an organized federation of religions is neither possible nor really desirable: "Oomoto does not seek to unite religions organizationally, but seeks rather to promote peaceful and friendly relations among religions" (Hazama H.); "Uniting religions is impossible. We seek cooperation. Some religions don't want to cooperate – we can't force them. But if people come to the conclusion that cooperation is better than conflict, they join in cooperation" (Nishinaga A.). The other half of subjects was, however, convinced that religious federation is hoped for – "Such a federation was already created in the time of Onisaburo. Oomoto hopes that a world federation of all religions

will be created in the future” (Okuwaki T.) – or even inevitable, “In the future, a world federation of religions will be established, just as a world federation of nations will be established” (Yamada U.).

From this we can conclude that while there appears to be a consensus as to the general aims of interfaith cooperation – ending conflict between religions and promoting friendship and cooperation among them – there is less agreement as to the ultimate ends of interfaith cooperation – which, in turn, suggests that Oomoto teaching on this point is not clearly defined. Clearly defining a position on this question may not be important for Oomoto if the idea of model is taken into account:

The example of the Federation [of religions established by Onisaburo] remains as one of the earliest world efforts – the first in East Asia – to unite all religions in one cooperative organization. This precedent has special meaning for Oomoto which conceives of itself as a “mirror” where events enact themselves in miniature before they later manifest in the world at large (The Oomoto Foundation, 1997, p. 7).

Perhaps, then, those who see the creation of a religious federation as inevitable see it as an outcome of the ultimate reconstruction of the world foretold in the *Ofudesaki*, while those who see the creation of such an organization as impossible are thinking in terms of efforts on the part of the Oomoto organization alone (efforts which are small and limited in scope).

#### 4.3 Role of Japanese language, culture, Shinto ritual and Japanese people/nation

Though Oomoto, due to Onisaburo’s influence, was able to move beyond the xenophobic aspects of the early period (whether these tendencies were inherent in Nao’s revelation or whether followers just interpreted them in such a way), certain

nationalist/nativist elements seem to persist in Oomoto. As discussed earlier, emphasis on Japanese language and culture, use of Shinto liturgical forms, and a special role for the Japanese people or Japanese nation are the most notable (recruitment or non-recruitment of non-Japanese people will be discussed in the following section).

As to Oomoto's roots in Shinto, interview subjects were in agreement that Oomoto can be considered a Shinto sect, because it is derived from Shinto, but has its own particular doctrine (like Tenri-kyo, Konko-kyo and other Shinto sects, yet unlike traditional Shinto which has no formal doctrine as such). Oomoto is thus a Shinto sect in the broad sense, while never having had official designation as such, and was never part of the imperial system of Shinto<sup>112</sup>. Nonetheless, many respondents were quick to add that the government's persecution of Oomoto was due to a "misunderstanding" or "mistake" on the part of the state (the "mistake" being corrected with the end of WWII and the resolution of the Second Oomoto Incident), thus minimizing or softening the Japanese government's culpability in the religion's persecution.

According to Mr. Yamada, the appearance of Shinto sects in modern times is due to the fact that while ancient peoples were able to perceive/feel the divine directly, without words or teachings, modern people need instruction and explanation. Oomoto, he added, also seeks to reawaken this ability in people to directly experience the divine.

While there was also agreement that Oomoto's Shinto-style ritual constitutes a nationalist<sup>113</sup> aspect of Oomoto, responses nonetheless suggested that this aspect (Shinto-based ritual) is not essential:

The Third Spiritual leader defined the essence of Oomoto thusly: worship God, pray to God, have a direct relationship with God, put the teachings into

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<sup>112</sup> Discussed in detail in Chapter I.

<sup>113</sup> Any use of the word "nationalist" in this section refers only to a cultural sense. There is a distinction made in the original Esperanto version of the interviews that cannot be adequately expressed in English. The word used here is "nacieca", which roughly means "having to do with nation/nationality" or "having a national character". The word "naciista" would denote the more political sense of "nationalist".



practice, purify your heart. She made no mention of liturgical forms. She never said that Oomoto requires Japanese language or Shinto ritual. Such a narrowly defined ritual style is not absolutely necessary, I think (Nishinaga A.).

To a great extent, religions depend on eras and nationalities. Oomoto was born in Japan, so it has been strongly influenced by Japanese nationality. But Oomoto believers can worship in other ways – we don't insist upon Shinto-style worship (Yamada U.).

Other replies were in the same vein – in fact, no subject suggested that Shinto-style liturgy was a *sine qua non* of Oomoto. On the other hand, clear examples of Oomoto worship in a completely non-Japanese context (i.e. not just physically outside of Japan, but Oomoto adapted to an entirely different cultural setting) are lacking, as the limited instances of Oomoto practice outside Japan or by non-Japanese (as with the Oomoto temple in Brazil or the Oomoto center in Mongolia) are nonetheless firmly rooted in Japanese culture, even if minor modifications are incorporated (we will discuss this in greater depth in the following section).

The apparent dissonance between the supposed universal teaching of Oomoto (unity of God, common source of all faiths, unity of humanity) and the actual expression of Oomoto in a thoroughly Japanese form suggests a distinction in the subjects' minds between Oomoto as the "Great Origin" and Oomoto as a particular Japanese religious group. Mr. Tanaka framed this distinction thusly:

We think Oomoto is for Japanese people. We value Japanese cultural traditions – Noh, tea ceremony, music, poetry, Shinto-style ritual – yet the philosophy of Oomoto is universal. In my understanding, though, religious expression must be local.

Similar perspectives were expressed regarding traditional Japanese arts (which most subjects grouped together with Shinto ritual and customs in the broad category of Japanese culture):

Japanese people are responsible for Japanese culture, but every people must respect and cultivate their own culture. However, Japanese culture is not an essential part of Oomoto, but is rather due to the historical and cultural context in which Oomoto developed (Hazama H.).

Thus, the cultural trappings of Oomoto are more contextual than essential: because Oomoto developed in (and continues to exist predominantly in) a Japanese cultural context, Japanese culture is important – as Japanese people are first and foremost responsible for the preservation and cultivation of Japanese culture, as other peoples are responsible for the preservation and cultivation of their respective cultures.

Nonetheless, the fact that Japanese arts and culture must be a priority for Japanese people does not preclude non-Japanese people from potentially benefitting from Japanese arts and culture:

Though not essential, Japanese traditional arts can teach spiritual truths and discipline. Also foreigners can learn from Japanese arts. Traditional arts can communicate spiritual truths that are otherwise hard to understand from texts (Tabuchi Y.).

In fact, though a culturally nationalist aspect of Oomoto, the emphasis on traditional Japanese arts has been a point of attraction for many of the non-Japanese people who have become Oomoto followers or sympathizers. We will discuss this point further in the following section.

As to the role of the Japanese language, I noted a similar consensus. The Japanese language is not intrinsically sacred, but rather sacred through its context in Oomoto: Nao's *Ofudesaki* and Onisaburo's revelations came through the medium of the Japanese language, thus making it sacred for Oomoto. Furthermore, the idea of *kotodama* (the belief that sounds and combinations of sounds have mystical properties) plays a key role here. I asked interview subjects whether *kotodama* (see more on *kotodama* in Chapter I) applies only to Japanese. On this point there was general agreement that the sounds of human language generally have mystical properties, not

just the Japanese language. On the other hand, in regards to translation of Oomoto basic prayers into other languages there was a divergence of responses. While all subjects agreed that all Oomoto prayers could be translated for explanatory purposes, not everyone agreed that translated prayers could or should be used in actual worship. This is especially true of the fundamental prayer *Kamigoto* (which, as mentioned earlier, is not original to Oomoto, but is derived from an ancient Shinto prayer): according to Mr. Agoo, though other prayers may be translated (into Esperanto, Portuguese, English, etc.) and used in worship, the two fundamental prayers, *Kamigoto* and *Amatsu-Norito*, are untranslatable and unchangeable. Mr. Agoo explained that this is due both to the combinations of sounds (*kotodama*) in these prayers and the multiple layers of meaning in the Japanese text that cannot easily be conveyed in other languages.

As to the role of the Japanese nation or people in the divine plan, I noted a general consensus that the country of Japan does have a special role to play (a few of the respondents pointed out to me, however, that it is not the Japanese *people*, but rather the country of Japan that has a special role). Opinions varied, however, as to what the nature of this role is exactly. A common theme among subjects' responses was that Japan's role, while special, is not unique: each country (or, in certain cases, groupings of countries or geographic regions) has its own role to play. Two subjects specifically mentioned that Oomoto's idea of Japan's role is not like that of the Hebrew/Jewish people: the Japanese are not a chosen people, set apart from all others.<sup>114</sup> Rather, like organs in the body, each country has its own important, yet distinct, function.

Among the roles Japan should play, according to the subjects, are that of promoting peace, abolishing nuclear weapons (even nuclear energy), and, more generally, demonstrating harmonious coexistence between man and nature:

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<sup>114</sup> Viewed in the light of earlier (pre-WWII) nationalist notions of Japanese identity – in which Japan was viewed as the “land of the gods” and the Japanese people as a divine people – this notion is rather universalistic.



Japan's role is to be a leader in science, interfaith cooperation, work for world peace and abolition of nuclear weapons. Other countries have their own roles to play (Yamada U.).

Japan's role is to be a model of harmony between nature and humans (Saito T.).

Japan has a mission to be a good model to the world – it is a peaceful country, low crime rate, people respect each other. Japan must demonstrate to the world the spirit of *wa* – harmony, both with each other and with nature – Japan should spread this spirit of *wa* so that other nations may learn from it. Also, as Japan is the only country to have ever been bombed by nuclear weapons, and in light of the recent nuclear tragedy in Fukushima, Japan should be a leader in opposing atomic energy and nuclear weapons (Tabuchi Y.).

One particular example of a recent Oomoto-sponsored project that illustrates such a role for Japan (or Japanese culture, at least) is worth mentioning here. Starting in 2003, the Oomoto Israeli-Palestinian Peace Institute,<sup>115</sup> in cooperation with local governments (the municipal governments of Ayabe and Kameoka, for example), has coordinated the Israel-Palestinian Peace Project. In the framework of this project, Israeli and Palestinian teens whose families have been affected by Israeli-Palestinian violence are invited to Japan to spend time in Japanese host families. In each host family are placed one Israeli and one Palestinian teen. The teens are then involved in various Japanese cultural activities with the host family and the greater community. The basic idea is to have the Israeli and Palestinian teens interact with each other in a setting and environment completely foreign to them, and one far removed from their native land – with the hope being that, when confronted with a culture very different and far removed from their own, they will realize they have more in common with each other than they have differences (Yano H.; mentioned also in Roberts, and in *La Riverogo*).

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<sup>115</sup> Organizationally separate from Oomoto, though founded by and affiliated with it.

Of course, as with Oomoto's interfaith activities, the real-world impact of this project is limited. But, viewed as *kata* (model), we can see the role of Japan as peace agent symbolized here.

Overall, then, I received the impression from my interview subjects that much of what I perceive as nativist elements in Oomoto are more superficial, and conditioned by Oomoto's history and geographical and cultural context, rather than doctrinally binding aspects of the faith. Even as these elements constitute Oomoto's particularity (as opposed to the very broad, universalist elements shared by many religious movements and philosophies), they are nonetheless not presented as being distinctions based on hierarchical superiority, but rather distinctions based on differences in role and function.

#### 4.4 Role of proselytism, Oomoto in non-Japanese context, and Oomoto as a universal religion

In addition to the shift in emphasis away from overt proselytism through Esperanto (or, at least, a shift away from direct promotion of Oomoto abroad) discussed in the section on the role of Esperanto, there remains the question of the general attitude towards recruitment of foreigners (Esperanto-speaking or not). As noted earlier, the English-language version of the Oomoto website stated that non-Japanese are not encouraged to join:

Oomoto does not encourage people from outside Japan to join. The traditional Japanese rituals and practices can be difficult for a foreigner. Because Oomoto teaches that all religions come from the same source, Oomoto believes it is more appropriate for people to participate in religions more suitable to their own culture and language. That said, Oomoto does have a few

non-Japanese members, usually the spouses of Japanese, or people with some other strong connection to Oomoto, through the arts, for example.<sup>116</sup>

When I prefaced my questioning about the recruitment of foreigners with this statement, the majority of subjects were quite surprised that such a statement was on the website, and most did not agree with that statement:

I don't agree with that. Oomoto is a national religion – it came from ancient Japanese tradition. But we can share the feeling of our religion even with Western people and other Asian people – we can share the same feeling in praying to God. Now I recommend joining Oomoto to many foreign people. 20 foreign people have joined Oomoto on my invitation and recommendation. We try to recommend foreign people to join Oomoto. The statement on the website was one person's idea. Everything has two aspects. This idea is correct, but I think my idea is also correct (Kimura K.).

It seems that that statement is due to a translation problem. The English website was the product of a native English speaker who worked at Oomoto for many years. But we encourage foreigners to come to Oomoto. We have centers in Brazil and Mongolia where there are many non-Japanese members (Ago T.).

That's not Oomoto's general tendency, I don't think. Oomoto is a Japanese-derived religion, and therefore somewhat difficult for non-Japanese people. For that reason the person who wrote that statement felt that way – and I understand that such a perspective can be found among some Oomoto members (Okuwaki, T.).

Those who agreed that this statement reflects Oomoto's general position on the issue of recruitment of non-Japanese, did, however, take care to emphasize that this does not mean active discouragement or exclusion:

We welcome foreigners. If you're interested in traditional Shinto ritual and Japanese traditional arts, we welcome you to join Oomoto. We do have members outside of Japan and members who are not Japanese. But we don't send missionaries out to other countries. ... Oomoto is very Japanese. Japanese people can convert to Islam or Judaism, but it is strange for a Japanese person to recite prayers in Arabic or Hebrew (Tanaka, M.).

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<sup>116</sup> <http://www.oomoto.or.jp/English/enFaq/indexfaq.html> retrieved December 2013. The site has since been updated and this paragraph removed.



That is a common perspective in Oomoto. We don't strongly encourage people from other religions and cultures to join. We must respect every culture, and not impose Japanese culture (Hazama H.).

It is clear, therefore, that even among Oomoto representatives there is no clear consensus on the question of recruitment of non-Japanese. We may note, however, that a common theme among responses is the idea that Oomoto should not be pushed upon anyone – especially those without a Japanese cultural background or heritage. Those who take the more extreme view that foreigners should not be encouraged to join Oomoto, seem to do so in the context of not wanting to impose Japanese ritual and culture on non-Japanese people. On the other hand, those who are open to the idea of recruitment of non-Japanese people, also emphasise Oomoto's soft, non-intrusive approach that must be viewed in the context of the unity of all religions. Behind both these attitudes, however, lies another idea: the idea that, ultimately, conversion to Oomoto is not really necessary, due to the unity of religions according to the doctrine of *bankyo-dokon*. We will discuss this idea further a bit later.

Whatever the attitude towards conversion of non-Japanese, Oomoto is, in fact, already practiced in non-Japanese contexts. As mentioned earlier, in addition to isolated individual followers in various countries, Oomoto maintains centers in Brazil and Mongolia – where many of the members are non-Japanese.

Why in these two countries in particular? The reason for Brazil is historical and demographic: in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century large numbers of Japanese (mostly poorer, rural people – a key base of early Oomoto support) emigrated to Brazil. Today ethnic Japanese make up around 80% of Oomoto members in Brazil (Asai K.). Mongolia, on the other hand, is a bit less obvious, and has more to do with symbolism than demographics: Onisaburo said that Mongolia is key to peace in Asia, and Asia is

key to peace in the world<sup>117</sup> (Kimura K.). Unlike Brazil, the majority of Mongolian Oomoto members are ethnic Mongolians.

Oomoto ritual practice in Brazil and Mongolia follows the same basic form as in Japan, with allowance for certain superficial adaptations, according to Asai K. and Kimura K. Locally available foods, as opposed to traditional Japanese foods, may be used for offerings, chairs may be used for seating, instead of sitting *seiza* on *tatami* mats, and the rigor of the Shinto ritual style is somewhat relaxed (Asai K.). The fundamental prayers, *Kamigoto* and *Amatsu-Norito*, are always recited in Japanese (with explanatory texts in the local language available), while other prayers may be recited in the local language. The availability of Oomoto's sacred texts in the local languages is, however, quite limited. While the *Oomoto Shinyu* (the authorized version of the *Ofudesaki*) is available in Portuguese (in the condensed "international" edition – the same text available also in Esperanto), only excerpts of the *Reikai Monogatari* are available in Portuguese (as is the case with Esperanto and English), and only excerpts of any of the sacred texts are presently available in Mongolian.

What is particularly interesting to note about Oomoto in its current "international" setting is the attitude of non-Japanese followers to its particularly Japanese character. Mr. Kimura Katsuya, who has worked extensively with the Mongolian center, noted that practically all of the Mongolian adherents are attracted to Japanese traditional culture: Japanese language study, martial arts (especially Aikido) and Japanese arts. As for non-Japanese Brazilian adherents, Mr. Asai Kiyotaka – who spent six years working at the Oomoto center in Brazil – noted that many converts were attracted to Oomoto's healing rituals, while others were drawn by an interest in Japanese culture. He added, however, that when the Brazilian center introduced prayer forms in Portuguese, it was predominantly the *non-Japanese* adherents who expressed a desire to return to the Japanese language prayer texts, even though they did not understand

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<sup>117</sup> A fact that explains Onisaburo's unsuccessful expedition to Mongolia in the 1920s.

the content. He claimed that non-Japanese Brazilians who converted to Oomoto said they felt that Oomoto was the embodiment of Japanese culture, and, when praying in the Oomoto temple they felt the presence of God (Asai K.).

This phenomenon – i.e. Oomoto’s “national” character being a point of attraction for non-Japanese converts – is quite common, even to the point of being the norm. When I brought up the question of non-Japanese converts, a common theme among subjects’ responses was the attraction of Japanese culture and arts.

During my stay at the Oomoto Center in Kameoka I had the opportunity to meet two new non-Japanese Oomoto members, Linda and Mark Irving<sup>118</sup>, artists from California. They have had a relationship with Oomoto for over 30 years, a relationship that has centered on Japanese traditional arts.<sup>119</sup> Deeply in love with Japanese culture and arts, Linda now brings groups of Americans interested in learning more about Japanese arts and culture to study at the Oomoto Center. Over the course of this relationship with Oomoto, Linda and Mark were invited to become members several times (challenging the idea that Oomoto “does not encourage non-Japanese to join”). They characterized their decision to join as being based on their relationship with the people at Oomoto and the arts – it was not a “conversion” or belief in automatic writing or the revelations. Mark stated that though he supported the major themes of Oomoto (as he perceives them), such as the unity of religions and the spiritual aspect of artistic practice, there are certainly doctrinal aspects of Oomoto he would be less comfortable with, especially if taken literally. As to the procedure for becoming members, they said they only had to fill out a brief form and give a nominal donation (2000 yen – around \$20) – they were not asked to subscribe to any doctrines nor commit to any specific spiritual practice. This contrasts with the normal procedure for joining Oomoto described to me:

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<sup>118</sup> Actual names changed, as they were not part of the official interview sample, though they both fully consented to the same interview conditions as other subjects.

<sup>119</sup> Linda was a student in the Oomoto School of Traditional Japanese Arts, where she studied not only traditional arts, but also learned Shinto liturgical technique.



to become a member one must adhere to the teachings of Oomoto, make a minimum monthly or yearly financial commitment, and commit to daily prayer at some sort of home altar where the Oomoto deity is enshrined (Okuwaki T.). Mark and Linda said they knew they would never be “model members”, but they also felt that they weren’t really expected to be. This seems to confirm an impression I had received based on conversations with Oomoto representatives on the topic of non-Japanese members: expectations for non-Japanese members are somewhat different, more relaxed than for Japanese members. This seems to mainly apply to Japanese cultural and religious *practices* (as opposed to religious *beliefs*) in Oomoto such as maintaining and worshipping at a home altar (as it is common in traditional Japanese homes to maintain a small Shinto *kamidana* or “*kami*-shelf” ) and venerating one’s ancestors (as it is common in traditional Japanese homes to maintain a Buddhist altar where the ancestors are venerated). Non-Japanese members, it seems, are not necessarily expected to maintain these practices, nor study the Oomoto scriptures in depth (only possible if one can read Japanese) – adherence to the broad ideals and aims of Oomoto is sufficient (as mentioned in the previous paragraph, this stands in contrast with the normal membership requirements). As the numbers of non-Japanese Oomoto members are relatively very small, such a “two-tier” approach does not appear to be an issue, though if Oomoto were to have a large non-Japanese following this disjoint would need to be addressed.

As we have seen, then, Oomoto acceptance by (a very limited number of) non-Japanese has not necessarily had a universalizing influence on the faith. To the contrary, non-Japanese who choose to affiliate with Oomoto are primarily attracted by the traditional Japanese character of Oomoto and its support for traditional arts. Oomoto is then a sort of “specialized product”, a religion that combines openness to other religions with a strong support for traditional Japanese culture. Without the Japanese cultural aspect, Oomoto’s broad universalistic ideals would be non-distinctive, and without the universalistic aspect Oomoto would differ little from other Shinto sects. Thus, in a non-

Japanese context (i.e. among people not ethnically Japanese) Oomoto is a sort of “niche”, with limited appeal to a very narrow demographic (i.e. non-Japanese people interested in Japanese spirituality and traditional arts, who also value openness to other faiths and a universalistic outlook).

This brings us to another question: is Oomoto a universal religion, or could it become one? Could Oomoto become a universally applicable religion like Christianity or Buddhism, for example? In Oomoto’s earlier publications much is made of the universal character of Oomoto: Onisaburo as savior of humanity, the oneness and universality of God, the unity of all religions and their common source, etc. The emphasis on universality was not subtle, as suggested by the following titles of articles in *Oomoto* (English-language publication): “Oomoto, a Universal Popular Religion”, “Oomoto’s Mission as a Universal Religion”, “What characterizes Oomoto as a Universal Religion”, and, in *Oomoto* (Esperanto-language publication), “Oomoto, Mondsave Religio” (“Oomoto, a religion of world-salvation”). But, to what degree is Oomoto universal, or to what extent could it become universal, in the eyes of Oomoto representatives? As in other areas discussed above, opinions diverged on this issue.

Though all subjects acknowledged the presence of universalist (see definition in Chapter II) elements in Oomoto’s teachings, a slight majority felt that Oomoto either is already a universal religion, will become one, or could potentially become one. Those subjects who saw Oomoto as universal or potentially universal stressed the central teachings (as they perceive them) of the unity of religions and the brotherhood of mankind. Several subjects noted, however, a distinction between the universal nature of Oomoto (inherently present) and the potential for Oomoto to become a widely practiced international religion such as Christianity or Buddhism:

The central idea of Oomoto is universal. But for Oomoto to become a religion practiced in many countries and cultures concerted effort and resources would need to be devoted to this goal. Very few foreigners join Oomoto today. But it [spreading widely around the world] is theoretically possible (Okuwaki T.).

In the future, I hope Oomoto will become an international religion. Thanks to Esperanto, people can learn a lot about Oomoto. But it takes time. Jesus Christ was born over 2000 years ago. Christians had to hide themselves in catacombs in the early days. Later Christianity became an international religion. It takes time and effort (Tabuchi Y.).

Universality is inherent in the teachings of Oomoto. But to truly internationalize Oomoto and spread it around the world would depend on the directive of the Spiritual Leader and would require great effort. If we don't strive to define the essence of Oomoto teaching and apply local customs and culture to our liturgy, Oomoto will never spread widely outside of Japan. But it's difficult to do this without enormous will and effort. I'm not pessimistic about the possibility, however (Asai K.).

Those who took the contrary view focused on Oomoto's character as a particularly Japanese religion, all the while maintaining that Oomoto has important universalistic ideals that provide a basis for cooperation with other faiths:

I don't think it is possible. Oomoto is very Japanese in style. It's not possible for it to become international like Christianity. Oomoto encourages people to share the same idea, but not everybody will become Oomoto members. It's not necessary. Oomoto wants one very simple thing: world peace. All people can live in peace (Kimura K.).

The underlying theme, though, common to all responses, is the idea that the central idea of Oomoto is universal. Those who believe Oomoto is or will become a universal religion based their belief on the central universal idea of Oomoto (one universal God). Those who stated that Oomoto is not, per se, a universal religion, based their view on Oomoto as an existing institutional religion firmly (and persistently) rooted in Shinto and Japanese culture.



#### 4.5 Role of duality and the doctrine of Izu-Mizu

“Why do westerners like to see everything in terms of conflict?” – Okuwaki Toshiomi’s reaction to my question as to whether there is a conflict between the internationalist and nativist elements in Oomoto. This spontaneous statement sums up the prevailing view of interview subjects regarding this particular duality in Oomoto. All subjects acknowledge the existence of a duality of internationalist and nativist elements in Oomoto, yet all but one saw no tension, conflict or anything that would need reconciling:

Nationalist and internationalist thinking are like two wheels on a cart – they are both necessary and must work together in harmony. Both are worthy of respect. Internationalism alone is insufficient, in my view (Agoo T.).

Oomoto is a national religion and a universal religion. It has two aspects. The nationalist aspect is often symbolized by the writings of Deguchi Nao, while the internationalist aspect is represented by Deguchi Onisaburo. It may appear contradictory, but mysteriously tying those two aspects together is Oomoto (Yamada U.).

There is no contradiction between Oomoto’s nationalist and internationalist aspects. To be active internationally, one must be rooted in one’s own nationality as well. A people or religion without nationality doesn’t make sense. Raising awareness of our own national culture is part of Oomoto’s international activity. Oftentimes foreigners will point out the beauty of our culture that we Japanese may fail to realize (Inagaki Y.).

Thus, the great majority of subjects were of the opinion that being rooted in one’s national culture was a prerequisite for being engaged internationally – one cannot engage with other cultures if one is not engaged with one’s own. Likewise, internationalist orientation is a necessary partner of national orientation – without the international aspect, national culture becomes closed and narrow. As Mr. Agoo noted, “like two wheels”. In fact, these two orientations are so deeply rooted in Oomoto that several subjects did not really understand what I meant by “tension” or “contradiction” between these two aspects, because they had never really thought of it in such terms.

A more nuanced view of the internationalist-nativist duality was offered by Nishinaga Atsushi:

I'm not really sure that the nativist tendency and internationalist tendency are reconciled. Historically there was much conflict regarding these tendencies, and there is still a bit of a balancing act between the two. It's nice that we have both aspects. But to assert that Nao embodied the nationalistic aspect and Onisaburo the internationalist aspect is too simplistic. Onisaburo was also a nationalist of sorts. Some say that, given the nationalistic imperialism of the Japan of his era, he had no choice but to present himself as a nationalist. In my view he was both a nationalist and internationalist. But the nationalist-internationalist distinction is foreign for us. If one is bothered by nationalism, Onisaburo was neither nationalist nor internationalist. For him nationality was completely unimportant. In that case nationalism and internationalism have no meaning.

Here we begin to see that the internationalist-nativist duality may not necessarily be explained by the duality of the two founders, as Onisaburo himself embodied this duality as well – which brings us to my hypothesis: that the internationalist-nativist duality in Oomoto may be explained through the doctrine of Izu-Mizu.

As we discussed earlier, Oomoto views the universe in terms of two polarities: horizontal-vertical, matter-spirit, female-male, etc. These polarities, expressed as the doctrine of Izu-Mizu, are traditionally associated with Nao and Onisaburo, and explain their contrasting characters and approaches. The interplay of these two polarities is seen as fundamental to existence:

Normally other religions have one founder – but Oomoto has two. Nao and Onisaburo, Ayabe and Kameoka, *Ofudesaki* and *Reikai Monogatari*. Two is perfect, one is imperfect. For that reason Izu-Mizu is a characteristic trait of Oomoto teaching. Father unites with mother and a child is produced. Two is the foundation of unity (Agoo T.).

According to the teaching of Oomoto, there is spirit and matter. When spirit and matter intermingle, force is produced. Spirit and matter must be balanced (Inagaki Y.).

As you will recall, in my hypothesis I proposed that the internationalist-nativist duality can be explained by the doctrine of Izu-Mizu. As I mentioned, this hypothesis was inspired by the following text:

The eastern continent is the birthplace of the world's cultures: Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam – they all come from Asia. And for that reason Asians can be proud that they have led all of humanity spiritually, but while they labored for hundreds of years in the invisible realm of the heart, the Europeans accomplished everything in the visible material realm (Nishimura, March 1926, p.1; translated from Esperanto by J. Amis).

This passage suggests that material progress is associated with the West (exemplified by Europe and North America) while spiritual progress is associated with Asia and the East. Furthermore, according to Oomoto teaching:

The Spirit of Izu is the God who fulfills the divine plan throughout the material and spiritual worlds, and who in the material world is mainly concerned with material reform; the Spirit of Mizu is the God who accomplishes salvation throughout the material and spiritual worlds, and who in the material world is mainly concerned with moral reform (Oomoto, Doctrinal Department, 2008, p. 53).

Therefore, it would seem that the Spirit of Izu is associated with material reform, while the Spirit of Mizu is associated with spiritual reform. By associating the West (which, from a Japanese perspective, most clearly embodies “foreign-ness”) with material progress and the East (with Japan being the most Eastern nation in Asia) with spiritual leadership, I thus hypothesized a parallel between Izu-Mizu and internationalist (foreign) and nativist (Japanese) aspects of Oomoto.

I found, however, that the passage from Nishimura cited above resonated little with interview subjects. There was a tendency to view the ideas expressed in that passage as naïve, dated, or no longer relevant:

That particular author writing at that particular time [1926] thought that. But now Japan has greatly progressed on the material plane compared to then. Japanese people have adopted an egoistic mindset – and the times have



drastically changed. For that reason I can't freely subscribe to such thinking. Nonetheless, at that time Japanese people had no idea what Europe was like. Most people couldn't imagine it, because there wasn't even television (Agoo T.).

That passage doesn't refer to the West as a whole, but only to the negative aspects of the West at that time: colonialism, too much emphasis on material science. That passage comments on the bad aspects of the West when these bad aspects were strong – but Japan came to imitate these same bad tendencies... Spirituality is lacking now, for Japanese people as well. For Oomoto there is not just the spiritual side or material side that matters – both are important. In Oomoto we say that it is also wrong to neglect material/scientific progress. But Japanese have forgotten the importance of spirituality and overemphasize the material/technological side (Yamada U.).

After the Meiji Restoration, Japan veered sharply in the materialist direction. At that time people thought that the countries of the West were very developed, especially with regards to material/technical matters. Eastern countries were not developed materially, but were inward-looking... But now people can easily travel internationally. Japanese cars are produced everywhere in the world. The difference between East and West is not so great. There is still a wide gap between North and South, but not between East and West (Hazama H.).

It would seem then, that the passage from Nishimura reflects an oversimplified view of the East-West relationship deriving from a time when Japanese perceptions of the West were limited. Likewise, most subjects felt that Izu-Mizu could not be clearly applied to the nativist-internationalist duality. Though Onisaburo, for example, is associated with the Spirit of Mizu, we cannot assert that Mizu is clearly associated with internationalism, since Onisaburo himself embodied nationalist tendencies as well. So, while matter and spirit do indeed belong to the Izu-Mizu duality, the matter-spirit duality cannot be clearly tied to the nativist-internationalist duality.

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen, both nativist elements and internationalist elements have played key roles throughout the history of Oomoto, though these elements have received different emphases in different periods of the religion's development. In the founding period, dominated by Oomoto founder Deguchi Nao, the faith was largely inward-looking and concerned with the reform of Japan through a return to the country's agrarian roots and Shinto-based spirituality (a purified Shinto, however, cleansed from Buddhist and Confucian, i.e. foreign, influences). Nao rejected the Western and modernist importations of the Meiji-era reforms (capitalism, liberalism, colonialism, science, etc.) and, as spokesperson of Ushitora-no-Konjin, warned that Japan was headed down the road to ruin. Salvation lay in returning to the "great source", i.e. the one true primordial God, and returning to a simpler way of living through rejection of modernist and foreign influences.

Following Nao's death, co-founder Deguchi Onisaburo dominated Oomoto and took the religion in a distinctly internationalist direction. Onisaburo advanced universalist ideals of religious unity, world peace and human brotherhood – ideals which he sought to spread using the neutral international language Esperanto and put into practice through religious and humanitarian cooperation. Onisaburo distanced himself from the dire apocalyptic prophecies of Nao and emphasised working towards an ideal world through interfaith and international cooperation.

After the suppression of Oomoto in the Second Oomoto Incident, Oomoto was reborn in a more moderate and modest form than in the previous two periods. The post-war period saw a balancing of Oomoto's more national aspects – with Japanese traditional arts coming to prominence in this era – and international aspects.

Nonetheless, in today's Oomoto one may still clearly distinguish aspects that fit into the category of internationalist and nativist/nationalist. Yet, as we saw in the interview portion, opinions are far from unanimous on the role and relative importance of these aspects.

Let us first consider the nativist aspects. As we saw in the interview portion, subjects were aware of elements in Oomoto that may be considered as nativist or nationalist (again, these words being understood in a *cultural* not political sense). We found consensus among subjects that elements such as Shinto liturgy, Japanese language prayer forms and focus on Japanese traditional arts constitute the cultural ethos of Oomoto. We must also note, however, that most subjects did not view these elements as being *essential*, i.e. a central part of the Oomoto religion. As a religion that has developed and existed in a predominantly Japanese context, Shinto ritual forms and traditional Japanese arts are, in Oomoto's view, most suitable to Japanese people.

The "non-recruitment of non-Japanese" position – one that we had posited as being another nativist aspect of Oomoto – did not, however, find much support among subjects. Most subjects felt that the idea that Oomoto does not encourage non-Japanese to join (which, as mentioned, I had originally found on Oomoto's English-language website) was an individual opinion, and not an official policy or stance of the religion as a whole. All subjects (including the minority who felt Oomoto does not encourage non-Japanese to affiliate) stated that non-Japanese are warmly welcome as members, all the while stressing that, because all religions share the same root, conversion from another religion is not necessary. Therefore, since this presumed particular nativist aspect found little support (beyond a mention in the English-language website, which has since been removed), it cannot be considered a true nativist aspect of Oomoto.

As to the international aspects of Oomoto, I was left with the impression that subjects perceived Oomoto's international/interfaith activities as deriving more directly from the religion's core ideals – that is to say, the core ideals of religious unity, human



brotherhood and peace, as opposed to the particular Japanese cultural aspects of Oomoto as a Japanese religious sect. Interfaith activity is viewed as an expression of the fundamental teaching of *bankyo-dokon*, while Esperanto is an expression of human brotherhood (as Esperanto is not the property of any particular country or people, and therefore is not tied to colonialism, imperialism, etc.). Both of these aspects, interfaith cooperation and Esperanto, though not part of Oomoto at its inception, have come to be viewed as essential parts of Oomoto's identity (at least, in the view of my interview subjects).

Though I began the study conceiving the nativist and internationalist aspects of Oomoto in a clear duality of sorts, the interview results leave a much less clear picture. While duality is a fundamental concept in Oomoto, it is not clear that a dualistic conception neatly applies to these two aspects of Oomoto which I have labeled as nativist and internationalist. On the one hand, while acknowledging certain aspects of Oomoto which may be labelled as nativist/nationalist and internationalist, most subjects did not feel that there is any tension or conflict between the two needing to be reconciled, but rather that one is necessary for the other, like two sides of a coin – i.e. one must be grounded in one's own culture (or religion) in order to be able to interact with other cultures (or religions).

That said, however, subjects' responses suggested that the essence of Oomoto, its core idea, is the common origin of all religions and the unity of humanity, not the Japanese cultural baggage in which Oomoto is dressed in its particular expression as a Japanese new religion. So, while certain *activities* may seem to fall into a sort of nativist/internationalist duality (like two sides of a coin or two wheels on a cart), the national *character* and universal *character* do not seem to have the same relationship. As suggested by subjects' responses, the *essence* of Oomoto is universal, however the *accidents* (to borrow Greek philosophical terminology) are national (Japanese) in character.

This distinction became more obvious when I questioned subjects about whether Oomoto is or could be a universal religion. As noted, responses diverged into two broad groups: those who said that Oomoto is, or will become a universal religion, and those who said it could not, or would likely not, become a universal religion. The divergence, it seems, derives from the subjects' understanding of universality in relation to Oomoto. Those who replied that Oomoto is or will become a universal religion focused on the essential central ideals of Oomoto as they understood them, i.e. the unity of religions and humanity. In this sense, Oomoto "writ large" is universal. Those who replied that Oomoto cannot, or probably will not, become a universal religion focused on the "accidents" (in the philosophical sense) of Oomoto, i.e. Oomoto as an organized Japanese new religion, rooted in Japanese culture and Shinto religion, operating primarily in Japan, with a primarily Japanese membership. In their opinion, Oomoto as an organized religion could not become a broadly practiced international or universal religion due to its cultural limitations. Nonetheless, those maintaining this position also felt that Oomoto's teachings on the unity of religions and humanity can and should be shared with other peoples.

What we have, then, are two broad conceptions about what Oomoto, in fact, is: a broad universal teaching on one hand, and a small, particular Shinto-based sect on the other. When viewed in this light, we can make better sense of Oomoto's attitudes towards recruitment abroad in various historical periods. Oomoto's most active period of recruitment abroad, in the 1920s and early 1930s, saw greater emphasis placed on the former conception of Oomoto. The Oomoto that was preached to a non-Japanese audience of this time was not one preoccupied by Japanese culture and Shinto liturgy and mythology, but one announcing a new age of peace, brotherhood and interfaith cooperation. As these ideals have gained broad international acceptance, Oomoto's uniqueness in this area has diminished. In today's Oomoto, therefore, most foreigners come to Oomoto *because of* its special character as a Japanese new religion that highly

values traditional Japanese culture (and also engages the international community), rather than just because of its universalistic ideals.

How, then, does this affect our hypothesis? I had proposed that the alleged nativist/internationalist duality could be understood by the doctrine of Izu-Mizu, as, based on the article in *Oomoto Internacia* by Nishimura in the 1920s, material progress derives from the West (i.e. not Japan), while spiritual progress derives from the East, and Izu is linked to reform of the material world, while Mizu is related to moral or spiritual reform – thus, Izu = material world = West/not Japan, and Mizu = spiritual world = East/Japan. According to this theory, then, the nativist/internationalist duality could be understood through the doctrine of Izu-Mizu.

The first problem with this theory is the one we just discussed. Based on subjects' responses, we cannot really conclude that the nativist/nationalist elements of Oomoto and the internationalist/universalist elements constitute a clear duality. Rather one – the universalistic ideals of Oomoto as a philosophical ideal – constitutes the essence, or inner spirit of the religion, while the other – the Japanese cultural dressing of Oomoto as a particular Shinto sect – constitutes the outer appearance of the religion. Thus, the relationship between these two aspects cannot be compared to other dualities in the Izu-Mizu paradigm: male-female, fire-water, positive-negative, light-dark, etc.

The second problem with this theory is that no substantial support was found for it from subjects' responses. The majority of subjects felt the opinion expressed by Nishimura was his individual opinion, and one that belonged to the time he was writing – i.e. not a principle that could be generally applied to Oomoto (neither then, nor, much less, now). Furthermore, no subjects felt that there was a link between the doctrine of Izu-Mizu and the nativist and internationalist elements of Oomoto.

Therefore, the hypothesis that the doctrine of Izu-Mizu can explain the (supposed) duality of nativist and internationalist elements does not hold up. Furthermore, the idea



that the nativist and internationalist elements of Oomoto constitute a true duality – in the sense understood in the doctrine of Izu-Mizu – must be called into question as well.

What, then, can be made of the seeming contrast in nativist/nationalist elements and internationalist/universalist elements in Oomoto? Perhaps Oomoto's youth and size may exaggerate these elements. After all, if we consider Christianity (or, more appropriately at that stage, the "Jesus Movement") in the first century after Jesus' death, we cannot speak of a truly universal religion – Christianity was still firmly attached to Judaism at that time and still struggled with the question of what aspects of Jewish culture should be retained and what aspects should be rejected. Perhaps Mr. Tabuchi was right – maybe Oomoto is just too young and still too small and geographically limited to compare it to established "international" religions?

We can conclude from this study, though, that, while broad consensus seem to exist on important issues, nuances and significant differences of opinion remain – even given the small and organizationally committed group involved in the study – suggesting that Oomoto as an organized religion is still defining stances on many important issues. As Oomoto was born from the teachings not of one founder, but from the teachings of two very distinct – even opposing – personalities, compromise and divergence of opinion are probably to be expected. We are left with the impression, then, that, in many ways, Oomoto is still a religion in the making. It is up to the membership and leadership as to whether Oomoto ultimately follows a path of international expansion (focusing more on its core universalist ideals), or remains a small, Japan-centered Shinto-based sect (that also happens to use Esperanto and engage in interfaith cooperation on a small scale).

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### I. Introduction

##### a. Overview of the project

- i. Title : « **La nova japana religio Oomoto : harmoniigo de universalecaj kaj naciecaj ideoj** » / « *The Japanese new religion Oomoto: reconciling nativist and universalist tendencies* »
- ii. Explanation of project: **Ĉi tiu projekto celas studi la ideon de dualeco en Oomoto, aparte la ideon de dualeco kiel ĝi rilatas al universalecaj (aŭ internaciecaj) aspektoj kaj naciecaj aspektoj de la religio. Apartan atenton ricevos la rilato de la doktrino de Izu-Mizu al la ideo de dualeco.** / *This project aims to study the idea of duality in Oomoto, especially the idea of duality as it relates to the universalist (or internationalist) aspects and the nativist aspects of the religion. Special attention will be given to the relationship of the doctrine of Izu-Mizu with the ideal of duality.*

##### b. Interview instructions, consent form, other

- i. Go over consent form and allow participant to read it. Answer any questions and ask participant to sign the form if he/she agrees to the conditions.
- ii. Explain that the interview will be recorded, expected duration, etc.
- iii. Explain that the absolutely « correct » answer is not necessarily expected, but rather the participant's understanding of the question being discussed.
- iv. Thank participant for finding the time to participate.

#### II. Interview body

- a. Identification: **Bv. diri vian nomon kaj titolon/rolon/fakon en Oomoto** / *Please state your name and title/role/department at Oomoto.*
- b. Universalism/internationalism

- i. **Oomoto estas konata en la Esperanto-komunumo tutmonde pro sia internacieco. Kion vi pensas pri la internacieca orientiĝo de Oomoto? / *Oomoto is known among the world-wide Esperanto community for its internationality. What do you think about the internationalist orientation of Oomoto?***
1. **Esperanto**
    - a. **Kion vi pensas pri la rolo/graveco de Esperanto en Oomoto? / *In your opinion, what is the role and importance of Esperanto in Oomoto?***
    - b. **Ĉu la rolo de Esperanto ŝanĝiĝis ekde ĝia enkonduko en la fruaj 1920-aj jaroj? Ŝajnas al mi, ke originale oni uzis Esperanto por varbi membrojn al Oomoto internacie, tamen nuntemp ŝajnas ke oni ne aktive varbas eksterlandanojn. Do, kiel vi vidas la evoluon de la rolo de Esperanto en Oomoto ekde ĝia enkonduko ĝis nun? / *Has the role of Esperanto changed since its introduction in the early 1920s? It seems to me that originally Oomoto used Esperanto to recruit members abroad, however today it seems that Oomoto doesn't actively recruit foreign members. How do you see the evolution of the role of Esperanto in Oomoto from its introduction to today?***
    - c. **Ĉu Esperanto iam estas uzata en Oomoto-ritoj? / *Is Esperanto ever used in Oomoto ritual?***
  2. **Kion vi pensas pri la rolo/graveco de interreligia agado en Oomoto? / *In your opinion, what is the role and importance of interreligious activity in Oomoto?***
  3. **Ĉu estas aliaj internaciaj aspektoj de Oomoto kiujn vi povas prikomenti? / *Are there other internationalist aspects of Oomoto that you can comment upon?***
- ii. **Ekde kiam Oomoto havas internaciecan orientiĝon? / *Since when does Oomoto have an internationalist orientation?***
- iii. **Ĉu vi pensas ke la internacia agado de Oomoto estas esenca parto de la religio? Kion ĝi alportas al Oomoto? / *Do you***



*think that Oomoto's international activity is an essential part of the religion? What does it bring to Oomoto?*

c. Nativism/nationalism

i. **Ĉu Oomoto estas ŝintoisma religio (sekto de ŝintoo), aŭ ŝinto-inspirita? / Is Oomoto a Shintoist religion (Shinto sect), or Shinto-inspired?**

ii. **Samtempe kun sia internacieco, Oomoto ankaŭ tre emfazas la japanan kulturon, japanan lingvon kaj aliajn specife japanajn aferojn. / Alongside its internationalism, Oomoto also puts great emphasis on the Japanese culture, Japanese language and other things specifically Japanese.**

1. **Laŭ vi, kiuj estas la specife japanecaj, japancentraj aŭ eĉ naciismaj aspektoj de Oomoto? / In your opinion, what are the specifically Japanese, Japan-centric or even nationalistic aspects of Oomoto?** (follow up questions based on responses)

2. (If the participant has not already volunteered these) **Se mi bone komprenas, iuj gravaj naciecaj aŭ japancentraj aspektoj de Oomoto estas: la praktiko de tradiciaj japanaj artoj kiel religia devo, la sankta karaktero de la japana lingvo por diservo, ne-instigo al ne-japanoj aliĝi al Oomoto, kaj centra rolo por Japanio en la dia plano por la rekonstruo de la mondo. Ĉu, laŭ vi, tio estas ĝusta prezento? / If I understand correctly, some of the important nativist or Japan-centric aspects of Oomoto are: the practice of traditional Japanese arts as a religious obligation, the sacred character of the Japanese language for ritual use, discouragement of non-Japanese from converting to Oomoto, and the central role Japan is given in the divine plan for the reconstruction of the world. Is this an accurate characterization, in your opinion?**

(Follow up depending on participant's reaction to above. For example, if the participant challenges the statement that non-Japanese are discouraged from joining Oomoto, I will ask his/her view of non-Japanese converting to

Oomoto, proselytism and missions; special role for Japan in divine plan, etc.)

- iii. **Ĉu vi pensas ke la kunekzisto de internaciecaj elementoj (kiel Esperanto kaj interreligia agado) kaj ŝajne naciecaj elementoj (kiel ni diskutis supre) estas kontraŭdiro en Oomoto?** / *Do you think that the coexistence of internationalist elements (such as Esperanto and interfaith work) and seemingly nativist elements (as we discussed above) is a contradiction within Oomoto?*
1. (if yes) **Kiel vi harmoniigas tiujn kontraŭojn?** / *How do you reconcile those two opposites?*
  2. (if no) **Kiel, do, vi klarigas tiun ŝajnan tension?** / *How then do you explain that apparent tension?*

d. **Izu-Mizu**

- i. **Miakomprene, la doktrino de Izu-Mizu estas unu el la fundamentaj doktrinoj de Oomoto. Bv. klarigi ĉi tiun doktrinon laŭ via kompreno.** / *In my understanding, the doctrine of Izu-Mizu is one of Oomoto's fundamental doctrines. Please explain this doctrine in your own words.*
1. **Ĉu ĉi tiu doktrino estas originala al Oomoto? Ĉu estas simila instruo en kutima Ŝintoismo?** / *Is this doctrine original to Oomoto? Is there a similar doctrine in traditional Shinto?*
  2. **Kiel ĉi tiu doktrino aplikiĝas al la mondo ĝenerale?** / *How does this doctrine apply to the world in general?*
  3. **Kiel ĝi aplikiĝas al la historio, strukturo kaj funkciado de Oomoto?** / *How does it apply to the history, structure and functioning of Oomoto?*
- ii. **En numero de Oomoto Internacia de 1926, la redaktoro skribas ke la Oriento estas fonto de spirita evoluo, dum la Okcidento estas gvidanto en materia evoluo – la rolo de Oomoto estas harmoniigi la du. Kion vi pensas pri tiu diraĵo? Ĉu vi konsentas? Ĉu tio bone reprezentas la nunan vidpunkton de Oomoto?** / *In an issue of Oomoto Internacia from 1926, the editor writes that the East is the source of spiritual progress, while the West is the leader in material*

*development – Oomoto’s role is to reconcile the two. What do you think of this quote? Do you agree? Does it represent the current view of Oomoto?*

1. **Ĉu vi pensas ke tiu ideo povas sugesti paralelon inter la doktrino de Izu-Mizu kaj la dualeco de universaleco kaj nacieco en Oomoto? / Do you think that this idea could suggest a parallel between the doctrine of Izu-Mizu and the duality of universalism and nativism in Oomoto?**

**(follow up based on response)**

- iii. **Miakomprene, la Fondintino enkorpigas la spiriton de Izu, dum la Kunfondinto enkorpigas la spiriton de Mizu, ĉu ne? Tio iel klarigas iliajn malsamajn karakterojn kaj iliajn malsamajn vidpunktojn pri la direkto de Oomoto. Sed ankaŭ foje ŝajnas ke iliaj pensoj estis kontraŭdiraj: ekz. la forta kritiko en la Ofudesaki pri ĉiu eksterlanda influo, kompare kun la universaleca ideo de Aizenkai. Ĉu vi vidas tion kiel kontraŭdiron? (se ne, tiam kiel oni klarigas ĝin) / In my understanding, the Foundress embodies the spirit of Izu, while the Co-founder embodies the spirit of Mizu, correct? To a certain extent this explains their different characters and their differing viewpoints on the direction of Oomoto. But it also at times seems that their ideas were contradictory: for example, the strong criticism of all foreign influence in the Ofudesaki, compared with the universalist idea of Aizenkai. Do you see this as a contradiction? (if not, then how do you explain it?)**

- e. **Ĉu vi pensas ke Oomoto estas universala religio? Ĉu ĝi estas religio por la tuta mondo? Aŭ ĉu ĝi estas religio precipe por Japanio, kaj ne-japanoj devus aliri Dion per siaj tradiciaj religioj? / Do you think that Oomoto is a universal religion? Is it a religion for the whole world? Or is it a religion mainly for Japan, and non-Japanese should approach God through their traditional religions?**

### III. Conclusion

- a. **Ask the participant whether he/she has other comments to add or has questions for me.**
- b. **Thank participant.**



## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

#### **Interviews in Esperanto**

Agoo, Takashi: Director of the International Department. Interviewed 2013/10/23

Hazama, Hirotomi: employee of the International Department and board member of the Esperanto-Populariga Asocio de Oomoto (Esperanto Popularization Association of Oomoto). Interviewed 2013/10/23.

Nishinaga, Atsushi: Special projects, currently working on compilation of a book on the 120-year history of Oomoto. Interviewed 2013/10/25.

Okuwaki, Toshiomi: employee of the International Department and editor. Interviewed 2013/10/22.

Saito, Tadashi: Liturgical Department, rituals for ancestral spirits. Interviewed 2013/10/22.

#### **Interviews in English**

Irving, Linda and Mark (real names changed for sake of anonymity): artists and non-Japanese Oomoto members. Interviewed 2013/11/03.

Kimura, Katsuya: Secretary General of the Jinrui Aizenkai (Universal Love and Brotherhood Association) International. Interviewed 2013/11/07.

Tabuchi, Yasuo: Project facilitator, Israel-Palestine Peace Project. Interviewed 2013/10/30.

Tanaka, Masamichi: Special Emissary of the Spiritual Leader. Interviewed 2013/11/01.

Yano, Hiromi: Director of the Oomoto Israeli-Palestinian Peace Institute and employee of the International Department. Interviewed 2013/11/01.

**Interviews in Japanese with Esperanto interpretation**

Asai, Kiyotaka: Department of Missions, domestic section. Interviewed 2013/10/25.

Inagaki, Yasuhiko: Vice President of Jinrui Aizenkai (Universal Love and Brotherhood Association) and President of Jinrui Aizenkai International. Interviewed 2013/10/24.

Yamada, Uta: Administrative Department, Director of Interfaith Activities and Communications. Interviewed 2013/10/24.

APPENDIX C

SELECTED PHOTOS



Deguchi Nao (source: [www.oomoto.or.jp](http://www.oomoto.or.jp))





Deguchi Onisaburo (source: [www.oomoto.or.jp](http://www.oomoto.or.jp))



“One God, One World, One Interlanguage” monument (photo by Yevgeniya Amis)



Joel and Yevgeniya Amis with students of the Oomoto School (Esperanto class) with Okuwaki Toshiomi (left), their regular Esperanto teacher (photo by Yevgeniya Amis)



Entrance to the main building in Kameoka, with three flags flying: (left to right) Esperanto, Oomoto and Jinrui Aizenkai (photo by Yevgeniya Amis)



Library and archives at Kameoka Oomoto Center (photo by Yevgeniya Amis)



Choseiden, the main Oomoto temple in Ayabe (photo by Yevgeniya Amis)





The Autumn Grand Festival, procession (photo by Yevgeniya Amis)



The Autumn Grand Festival: Joel Amis (left) participating in *tamagushi hoten* -- offering of pine branches at the main altar (photo by Yevgeniya Amis)



The Autumn Grand Festival: presentation of offerings (photo by Yevgeniya Amis)



Aikido training session at the Kameoka Oomoto Center (photo by Yevgeniya Amis)



Tea ceremony study at the Kameoka Oomoto Center (photo by Yevgeniya Amis)





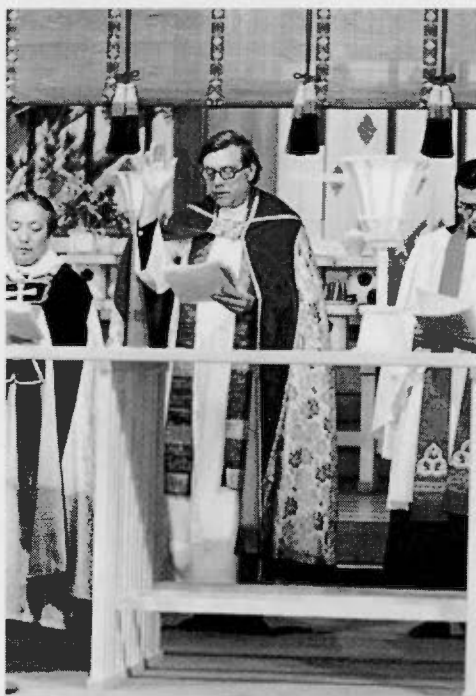
Presentation of Noh drama at the Kameoka Oomoto Center (photo by Yevgeniya Amis)



Oomoto priest (left) assists with Tao Yuan ritual (Tao Yuan representative on the right).  
Tao Yuan is Oomoto's oldest interfaith partner (photo by Yevgeniya Amis)



Oomoto liturgy in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York (1982, source: The Oomoto Foundation, 1997)



The Very Reverend James Parks Morton, Dean of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine (New York), performs an Anglican liturgy in Oomoto temple in Ayabe (February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1977, source: The Oomoto Foundation, 1997).

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