

Nationalism in Japanese New Religions: What are the National Conceptions of Japanese New-New Religion in the Post-Bubble Era? A Case Study of Konohana Family Community

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Abstract Nationalism in Japanese New-new religions (NNR) was evident since the establishment of such religious groups in the 1970s. While before the price bubble burst and Japan's economy stagnated, the justification for national supremacy relied heavily on Japan's economic power, since the 1990s, nationalist ideas stem from the cultural superiority of Japan, justified by the Shinto religion, the role of Japan as the land of the Buddha and the country which world peace will rise from, and the role of the Japanese as the chosen people. This study investigates a new justification for Japanese nationalism in a NNR established in the 1990s, Konohana Family Community (KH). The justification this group offers to the superiority of the Japanese is by the fact they are the descendants of the Katakamuna Civilization, the mythological inhabitants of Japan, which existed 13,000 years ago, had a supreme spirituality, and that could sense phenomena prior to their existence. The similarities between KH's and other current NNR's nationalism and the distinctiveness of KH's nationalist ideas will be discussed.

Keywords: nationalism, New-new religions, Konohana Family community, Japan, Shinto, Buddhism

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1. Introduction

Since the dawn of time, various groups in society have presented a tendency towards nationalism in their beliefs, actions, and personal sacrifice for the nation one belongs to. Such tendency is sometimes manifested in ultra-nationalism and national superiority. It is assumed that such tendency stems from a primal desire to preserve the national community and strengthen it against external threats throughout the time. Oftentimes in history, ultra-nationalism has led to severe conflicts and countless wars between nations, and at times also between two parties of the same nation. Although it would have been expected that in an era following two world wars, territorial wars, economic crises, and on the other hand, unions such as the European Union, nationalist trends would be minimized, yet if to judge according to ongoing wars and conflicts, it is safe to claim that there is still a long way to go.

Japan is no different when it comes to perceptions of nationalism. During the Edo period (1603-1868), the *kokutai*, a conception of Japan's sovereignty was elaborated. In this conception, the mythical books *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* were historical facts that determined that the Japanese Shinto gods and goddesses created the world,

the Japanese emperor was directly descended from the sun goddess, and all Japanese are unified as one body ruled by the emperor [1]¹. Another conception that focused on issues of Japanese national and cultural identity is the *Nihonjinron*, which became popular at the beginning of the 20th century. Such approaches contributed to the ultra-nationalism, and nationalist-militarist ideals of the late 1920s and 1930s, as can be seen in the doctrines of nationalist rightist groups, such as *Sakura Kai* [2] *Tenketo Kai*, *Jinmu Kai*, and *Ketsumeidan*. The ultimate demonstration of these ideals is the Japanese militarism and imperialism during World War II [3].

The centralism of the Japanese nation and its supremacy is also present in Japanese New-new religions. Ideas such as spiritual supremacy, the belief that the Japanese are the chosen people, Japan as the origin of the world, and the enlightened, spiritual East compared to the ill and materialistic West civilizations are common in New-new religions such as Worldmate, Aum Shinrikyō [4], Mahikari, Kōfuku no Kagaku [5], Agonshū ([6], 252) among other groups. Yet, while some of the justifications for the supremacy of the Japanese arose from the

¹ The *kokutai* was further elaborated by Kyoto School in the 1930s, see Goto-Jones, C. (2009). *Political philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School and co-prosperity*. Oxford: Routledge.

technological innovation and economic leadership [5], during the 1990s, at times when the price bubble burst and Japan's economy stagnated, New-new religions turned to new domains to strengthen their nationalistic views, such as human race, culture and tradition, the emperor, and the west (ibid, 151).

In this article, I will present a new perspective on Japanese nationalism in New-new religions, which deals with the justification of Japanese supremacy, which stems from new mythical beliefs of the origin of the Japanese nation. This article is based on one of the newest Japanese New-new religions, Konohana Family Community (founded in 1994). The community's nationalism, manifested in distinguished beliefs of Japanese supremacy, suggests a new domain in Japanese New-new religions studies.

2. New Religions in Japan

Japanese New Religious Movements (NRM) first emerged at the end of the 19th century. These groups were established by charismatic leaders who introduced new interpretations to existing religions like Buddhism and Shinto. Some of the most prominent examples are Tenrikyō and Ōmoto-kyō, which attracted thousands of followers, and still operates until this day. The new religious movements were striving to form a new social order by encouraging followers to act for the sake of the group, participate in rituals, and in group's activities, such as ceremonies, chanting and healing practices. Throughout the 21st century, tens of NRM were established, such as the Church of World Messianity (*Sekai Kyūsei Kyō*) and Mahikari, which both were formed by strong charismatic leaders who could cure illness through a divine light.

Scholars agree on a fundamental shift in these groups' doctrines since the 1970s. New religions which were founded after this time were termed Neo-new religions or New-new religions (NNR) by Nishiyama Shigeru in 1979, a term that was later developed by Shimazono Susumu (see [7], 135). NNR are different from NRM by their hybrid teachings, as well as the concepts of 'the spiritual world', which emphasizes this-worldly benefits, and practices of "fixing the heart/mind" (*kokoronaoshi*) ([8], 247). The focus in NNR is on the individual's spiritual level, while they emphasize mental and physical practices to enhance it.

While some of these religions were soon to come apart, others strived and attracted thousands of followers, usually by impassioning to new ideas conveyed by inflaming speeches and written materials of their founders and the succeeding leaders. One of the ideas that had proven to draw new followers was nationalism, based on Japanese centralism. In the following paper, I shall pursue nationalism as it is reflected in modern Japan and its significance in NNR.

3. Nationalism and Religion in Modern Japan

Nationalism is a social movement that emerged in the 18th century, around the time of the French Revolution and

the American Declaration of Independence. Then, starting from Europe, nationalist ideas set sail and gained popularity in other parts of the world [9,10]. Nationalism is defined as the desire by a group of people who share the same ethnicity, culture, language, etc., to form an independent country [11]. However, nationalism can also exist in a nation that already has a country established [12,13]. In the Japanese context, nationalist ideas were long studied, starting from the controversial work *The Chrysanthemum and The Sword* by Ruth Benedict [14], and continuing to Brown's comprehensive work, *Nationalism in Japan: An Introductory Historical Analysis* [15]. Most scholars agree that nationalist ideas in Japan were formed during the Meiji period when Japan needed to actively create a national identity in the light of the developing political and commercial relations it established with other nations. To enhance its uniqueness on the one hand, by establishing its own national anthem, flag, and national religion, and by that, assimilate in other leading world nations on the other, Japan, ironically, demonstrated its internationalism by nationalism.

Until the end of World War II, the State Shinto was the national religion, as the Japanese were seeking for a national religion, a concept that Christianity filled in the west (yet as Japan had a long history of banning and being reluctant from Christianity, they needed to adopt another religion as a state-religion, see Paramore, [16]). The State Shinto emphasized the notion that the emperor is a divine being and that Japan and the Japanese are the chosen nation and people [17]. During the post-war American occupation of Japan, which lasted until 1952, the State Shinto was banned, and the new constitution made clear that the emperor is the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people and not a divine entity anymore. In the articles concerning individual rights, freedom of religion was explicitly mentioned, and many religions which were oppressed during the war years could operate again.

While freedom of religion ensured that the State Shinto, which represented imperialist Japan during the war years and was a part of its justification for its aggressiveness when sending off troops to fight in the name of the semi-god emperor [18], its suppression was not about to put an end to nationalism in other Japanese religions. Moreover, the plurality of such religions, made possible by the new constitution, laid the ground for new kinds of religions, which some include doctrines that heavily rely on the uniqueness of the Japanese, although not necessarily on the divinity of the emperor, but on other nationalistic beliefs. In this article, the New-new religion of Konohana Family and its nationalistic ideas regarding the myth of the origin of nowadays Japanese people, the importance of the Shinto gods and goddesses, and the spiritual superiority of the Japanese will be presented.

4. Nationalism Concepts in New-new Religions in Japan

Although The Japanese population is said to be homogenous compared to other East Asian nations (except for a few distinct small ethnical groups such as the Okinawan, Ainu people, and Korean and Chinese residents), religious organizations in Japan varies greatly

([19], 27). Although most of the new religions are based on Buddhist or Shintoist ideas, each of their doctrines is unique. That being said, the commonalities between some religious groups' characteristics can indicate their scholarly sub-group like in the case of NRM and NNR, yet the beliefs, practices, and in-group social order they offer are unique. This is the case with nationalism in NNR, which despite the fact it is common in many new religious groups, takes a different shape in each and every one of them. This study will focus on nationalism seen in a NNR in the post-bubble era. Hence, it is not based on the economic superiority of Japan but stems from mythical beliefs on the origin of the Japanese, a theme which is yet to be studied.

While nationalist ideas can be political or economic, NNR tends to focus mainly on the cultural aspect of nationalism², which is embedded in Japanese history, traditions, and folk beliefs. One of the most repetitive motifs in the hybrid teachings of NNR is the notion that Japan is the spiritual center of the world. In Agonshū, it is portrayed as "the holy land of Buddha" (*budda no yomigaetta seichi*), from which Buddhism will spread and save the world ([6], p. 252), in Mahikari, Japan is the spiritual center of the world, where humankind arose, and the home to vestiges of ancient civilization ([5], 151), and in Kōfuku no Kagaku, modern Japan is the chosen nation while the Japanese are the chosen people, and a large number of high spirits reside in Japan (ibid). Furthermore, the notion that world peace will start in Japan, and from there, will spread to the rest of the world, is common in NNR such as Agonshū and Byakko Shinkōkai [6,20]. While these beliefs of the Japanese and Japan being the spiritual center of the world are also common in NRM such as Tenrikyō and Ōmotokyō, in NNR, these beliefs are a part of hybrid teachings which combines beliefs from Buddhism, Shinto, folk beliefs, and new ideas introduced by the group's leader, which is said to be speaking in the name of a high spiritual deity that guides them.

Oftentimes, Japanese NNR leaders are said to be communicating with Shinto deities, which forms the divinity in all elements in nature according to the animistic belief of the Shinto religion. As Shinto mythology describes the creation of the islands of Japan by the Japanese gods and goddesses, it emphasizes the notion that Japan has a special status when compared to the rest of the world³. Therefore, the Japanese are said to be a chosen nation as they were born on the "land of the gods". As seen above, many of the national ideas in NNR originates from the role of *the Japanese*, a title that could be simplified by the definition: those who were born in Japan and their ancestors were also born in Japan⁴. Therefore, it is claimed that the geographic location of

Japan plays a significant role in Japanese superiority. While NNR claimed so far that Japan is the holy land of Buddha, the spiritual center of the world, and the place where peace will rise from, the role of the geographic location (and the people who inhabit it) will be examined when looking at nationalistic ideas and beliefs in a NNR that adds an original chapter to the Japanese prehistory in its doctrines. The fluidity between the place and the people who live in it and its justifications for the superiority of Japan will be examined in a NNR called Konohana Family Community which is based in Fujinomiya in Shizuoka Prefecture.

5. Research Strategy⁵

This research objective is to explore current nationalistic concepts and perceptions in New-new religions in Japan. In order to investigate how nationalism is reflected in the doctrines, beliefs and practices of current NNR, the case of Konohana Family Community (KH) is presented. The current study was held in KH, which is considered by its members to be a self-sustained spiritual community. During three months of participant observation, held from October 2017 until February 2018, the author held 19 interviews with the community members, weekly meetings with the groups' spiritual leader, participated in dozens of community meetings, analyzed community learning materials such as articles, movies, songs, and presentations, and held countless unofficial conversations with community members. All interviews were semi-structured with questions that were chosen according to the role and background of the interviewed member and were recorded and transcribed with the full agreement of all interviewees. Community meetings and some of the unofficial conversations were transcribed as well. Then, all written materials were analyzed via qualitative content analysis based on the theory-guided text analysis of Gläser & Laudel [23]. First, relevant parts of the texts were extracted, then the given part was analyzed and interpreted. Text parts that were related to any form of Japanese centralism were carefully examined and will be presented in the next section.

Throughout the observation, various perceptions of national centralism beliefs were presented by the community leader and members, especially in materials written and created by them. In this article, I will only present the materials collected which are relevant to the research question, which deals with forms of nationalism in NNR. The justifications for national centralism and the perception of the Japanese nation in the eyes of the community members will be presented, analyzed, and discussed.

In the next few sections, factual information which implies on KH's nationalism in their spiritual doctrine and practices will be presented, along with the interpretations and insights derived from this data. First, the community will be presented. Then the community's profound belief in a distinctive form of Shinto will follow. The next

2 For further read on cultural nationalism, see Suzuki, [21].

3 For more information about the creation of Japan in the Shinto mythology, see Zhong [22].

4 In the current discussion the term "Japanese" will be simplified to "those who were born in Japan". Indeed, the post-modern world that is characterized by high mobility challenges this definition with Japanese living abroad for several generations (like Brazilian and Hawaiian Japanese), foreigners who are eligible for Japanese nationality, and those who their ancestors are from various origins. Yet, while 99% of the Japanese who reside in Japan are also Japanese' descendant, this simplification is claimed to be justified.

5 Following the claim that case studies have no method, but rather a research strategy ([24], p.323; [25], p.43), this section describes the course of the research.

section will deal with KH's unique mythology in the Katakamuna civilization, and lastly, KH's national centralism as the first heaven in East Asia will be presented as an example for nationalism. Discussion and conclusions sections will subsequently follow.

6. Konohana Family Community: a Family beyond Blood Relations

In 1994 Konohana Family Community was established by fifteen adults and five children, who had the intention to start a community in the countryside of Fujinomiya, Shizuoka Prefecture. It was called back then Konohana Farm (*konohana nō en*) and was established after this group's leader, Jijji, was gathering supporters for his idea of starting a new way of living as "one big family, beyond blood relations" (from KH official website). It was first named Konohana Farm, and later (date is unknown), the community changed its name to Konohana Family (KH). The name "Konohana" derives from the name of the Shinto goddess of Mt. Fuji, *Konohana Sakuyahime no Mikoto*, and the word "family" (in Japanese, *famiri*), which is a part of the community name, indicates the leading principle of the community: to live as one big family. As of August 2021, KH consisted of 89 members: 32 males and 57 females, which are 61 adults and 28 children. Since its establishment, about 150 people have engaged in it as community members (according to current members' memory), although only recently KH established a system of membership registration. These days, the community's income consists of a variety of channels: organic agriculture, lectures, educational programs, a café and shop named Lotus Land, a guesthouse, local events' food stands, monthly events, handyman services, Tanpopo healing massage and treatments clinic, and other occasional works such as selling pre-ordered lunch boxes. KH is also offering a 'natural therapy program' which helps individuals who suffer from mental illnesses and *bad habits* (usually referred to substance abuse, cigarettes, and alcohol) to heal without medicines through the spiritual guidance of Jijji and the help of members.

The work in the community is divided into several teams; rice-paddy team, harvest team, seedling team, fields team, Lotus Land team, office team, child-raising team, central team (house cleaning, laundry, etc.), kitchen team, and construction team. Work is done seven days a week, since the community is "*striving to live like the nature, and just as the sun will not take a day off, nor the bees, so do we need to work every day*" as Jijji explained in one of the community meetings. In the past, new members joined the community after they were introduced by a mutual acquaintance or participated in the community's activities. Later, the main channel through which new members found out about the community was via its website on the internet.

Around four years (no accurate date was indicated) after the community was founded, they achieved self-sufficiency, which they claim to still have. Being successful in attaining self-sufficiency and cultivating microorganisms, the community started offering tours and workshops through which new potential members could

be introduced. Throughout these tours and workshops, potential members who first had an interest in the environmental aspect of the community decided to join it after they were introduced not only to environmental practices but also to the values and life-purpose that the community is offering. These values and purpose, along with the reasoning and the logic behind them, were introduced by Jijji, as he is the only member in the community who has introduced new beliefs and practices that other members adopted throughout the years and the only member who can dismiss them when he considers them to no longer be beneficial for KH. The reason no other member could do so is simply since only Jijji has the ability to communicate regularly with the divine, which no other member has. The divine, in KH's case, refers to Shinto gods and goddesses.

7. Konohana Family and Shinto

One of the prominent nationalistic traits of the community is the belief in Shinto gods and goddesses, who are said to communicate with Jijji regularly, and who also conveyed to him the *right* way to practice Shinto at the summit of Mount Fuji, which is a holy mountain in Shinto. As the Shinto religion is based on the belief that Japan was the first land that was created by the divine, that Japan is *The Land of Gods*, and that the emperor of Japan is the descendant of the goddess of the sun, a profound belief in the Shinto religion can imply on national centralism.

The community's beliefs, practices, and values are based on Jijji's teachings, oftentimes referred to as "the truth". Yet, it is said that the Shinto deity only communicated with Jijji after he graduated Buddha's teachings, implying that Shinto is higher in hierarchy compared to Buddhism. It is based on Jijji's life story, which tells he was first possessed by Buddha, and then he became *a tool for the divine [Shinto gods and goddesses] to use*.

Before the community was established, Jijji, who had an interior design business, was consulting his clients, yet he claimed that it was not him that consulted, but Buddha was speaking through his body. He claims that "Buddha's words just came out of my mouth". Gradually, more and more people came to hear Jijji speak and give consultations, and a small group was formed. One of the founding members of KH recalled this period when various people gathered in Jijji's office and in other people's houses every evening to hear him speak:

In the beginning, Jijji was always in the center, and many people were around him. Buddha's teachings were like that. When Buddha was still with Jijji, that was a relationship like Jijji and Buddha are friends. But when Jijji turned 40 years old, Buddha has left, and the divine [kami⁶] came in. It has changed. After a while, when it was the time of the divine, we started to gather as a group. One day we had a meeting in Taki shrine. From there, we had a new start. Soon after that, about three years later, we made the decision to go to Mount Fuji together.

January 22, 2018

6 Kami is the name for Shinto gods and goddesses.

At the age of 39, it is said that Buddha's spirit left Jijji, and he started encountering Shinto gods and goddesses; the first was Amaterasu Ōmikami, the goddess of the sun and the most important deity in Shinto. After this encounter, a voice told Jijji to climb to the summit of Mount Fuji before the sunrise, and when he was there, he received this message from Amaterasu Ōmikami: "*Preach the spirit that you have learned and mastered from the divine to the whole land under the sun⁷ from now on.*" That was the time when he realized he should teach others how to go through the process which he went through, what he would eventually call "to polish the heart" (*kokoro wo migaku*). After years of consulting his clients, workers, co-workers, and their families, who had come regularly to hear him speak in his office and went with him to shrine visits, Jijji introduced the idea of starting a community in the area around Mount Fuji, as it was a highly important spiritual place for him, and the place he had received the message from Amaterasu Ōmikami. The mountain has a central role in Japan's history and has been believed to be the highest mountain in the world for many years. Therefore, for many generations Japanese believed it was the gate to the world of the divine. Jijji told them that this community will be one big family, beyond blood relations, and that it will not pollute the earth as they will be self-sufficient and will make a living via organic agriculture. Then he named the community after the Shinto goddess of Mount Fuji, Konohana Sakuyahime no Mikoto.

The community is also celebrating Shinto holidays like the Japanese New Year and the Setsubun. However, because they believe that the current Japanese society does not understand these holidays and practice them wrong, but Jijji, who has direct communication with the divine, do understand their essence, they celebrate the holidays differently. For example, in the Setsubun, the traditional first day of spring, which is celebrated on February 3, unlike the common Japanese phrase said in this holiday, *Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!* ("*Demons out! Luck in!*"), in KH, they say *Fuku wa uchi! Oni mo uchi!* Which literally means that they call both good spirits and bad spirits (demons) to come into the house. Jijji explained that demons are evil because humans have bad hearts. The demons look straight into humans' hearts, and by doing so, humans can reflect on themselves and improve their spirituality. That is why demons are welcome to KH during the Setsubun, so they will encourage members to improve their spirituality and *polish the heart*. Furthermore, some of the community's practices' terms are retrieved from Shinto, like *misogi*, the purification ceremony. Although the Shinto *misogi* practice is different from KH's practice, the name of the ceremony and the concept of a purification ceremony point at a direct connection to the traditional Shinto *misogi*. By choosing this name for the ritual, the roots of this idea could be quite identifiable as a Shinto ritual, which again strengthen the idea that purification is possible mainly by Shintoist Japanese rituals. The conception that Shinto rituals are the ultimate way to purify oneself emphasizes

again that the Japanese who believe in Shinto grasped the ultimate truth and therefore are spiritually elevated compared to others who do not hold such beliefs.

Some of the community members also identify themselves as Shinto clerics, although they are not recognized by any official Shinto institution. Their title as clerics is said to be given to them by the divine, Shinto gods and goddesses, which have direct communication with Jijji. Yūki, a man in his 40s, is said to be a Shinto priest, and he is KH's Shinto priest and is in charge of events and ceremonies, like rice-planting ceremonies, summoning Shinto gods and goddesses on special occasions and purification rituals. In addition to Yūki, Yumi, a woman in her 40s, is also known in the community for being a Shinto clerk, as she is KH's *miko*⁸. Having both a Shinto priest and a *miko* in the community points to a strong connection of the community to the Shinto religion. They are said to be a community that lives by the will of the Shinto deity and understand the Shinto much better than other Japanese people. By doing that, they do not only emphasize the importance of Shinto, the native religion of Japan, but also the spiritual superiority of KH in Japanese society. Yet besides the Japanese Shinto mythology, KH believes that after the creation of Japan and the world, the very first civilization in Japan was the Katakamuna civilization, who are the biological and spiritual ancestors of all Japanese, and whom nowadays Japanese should learn from. Although not related or based on any Shinto story, KH believes this civilization existed too.

8. Katakamuna – the Ancestors of all Japanese

Another nationalistic trait of KH is the belief that the Japanese are the descendants of a high spiritual, mythological civilization and that nowadays Japanese have the responsibility to revive such civilization. The Katakamuna is a belief that was introduced to KH in 2014 by a teacher specializing in it. Nevertheless, after a few classes, Jijji claimed that he realized that the community understood the Katakamuna much better than this teacher and therefore dismissed him and developed their own learning materials. Then, they started developing the Katakamuna theory based on the previous teacher's materials and explanations, eliminated some of his interpretations, added their own, and expanded it.

The original theory of the Katakamuna is based on the myth that 13,000 years ago, Japan was inhabited by people called the Katakamuna People, who, according to KH, are the ancestors of nowadays Japanese. People of this civilization could sense the potential of a phenomenon prior to its existence. Therefore, in the Katakamuna theory, there is a constant tension, dependence, and interaction between *the potential world* and *the phenomena world*, which will be further explained in the next paragraph. The vibrancy of the potential world could be sensed by the Katakamuna people, and they classified these vibrations into 48 sounds (syllables), which are said to represent the operating system of the universe: the universal structure of

7 "The whole land under the sun" is a translation of *hinomoto no kuni* (日本全国). First Jijji thought the meaning was "everyone in Japan", but later he admitted he was wrong in his interpretation, and noted that the meaning was that he should preach to "the whole world".

8 Shinto Shaman woman.

creation, development, and disappearance. It is said that for many years the Katakamuna theory was hidden from humans because they were far from a spiritual state that could support the understanding of the Katakamuna, but in 1949, a physicist named Narasaki Satsuki⁹ discovered the Katakamuna and revealed its' mystery during five years of research.

The name Katakamuna derives from the transformation of vibrancy from *the potential world*, the world of *kamu* (refers to *kami*, the divine), to *the phenomena world*, the world of *kata* (refers to the shape, or existence), and *na*, which is the shift from one world to the other. A simple example of this process would be human's life: before a given person was born, their spirit is in the *kamu* world, which is *the potential world*. After birth, the spirit is going through a qualitative shift, which is the *na*, and then the person is born and becomes a phenomenon in the world of *kata*, which is the *phenomena world*. After the person dies, the spirit will go again through a qualitative shift (*na*) and return to the world of *kamu*, the *potential world*. This process is said to happen in all phenomena we can observe, like thoughts becoming actions, the influence of our words, or any other aspect of life.

The importance of the Japanese people in the spiritual enlightenment of the world can be well observed in KH: the spiritual level that KH members aspire to be equivalent to is the Katakamuna people's level. KH members often refer to the Katakamuna people as their ancestors and chant from a book that is said to be written by the Katakamuna civilization. Therefore, being the descendants of the Katakamuna people is, in a way, increasing KH members' sense of responsibility towards spreading their ideas to the world and making it a better place to live in. KH members are encouraged by Jijji to *polish the heart* so they will be able to sense *the potential world* as the Katakamuna people used to, so they can live again the utopia that the ancient Japanese society used to live 13,000 years ago.

9. Japan as the First Heaven in East Asia

KH beliefs that Japan has a significant role in making the world a better place, as Japan will be the pioneer country that will form heaven on earth, first in East Asia and then in the rest of the world. In one of their songs called *The Age of Miroku*, they sing:

In order to make this planet a heaven

First, as a model

It is said there is a country to become heaven

That is the country called "Yamato"¹⁰

Yet not only do their songs suggest that Japan has an important role in being a model for the new social order to come. When one of the typhoons hit Japan at the end of 2017, at the same evening's community meetings, the members mentioned that because many typhoons hit Japan every year, it is a clean and pure country with pure nature. They also mentioned that once Japan changes, the whole world will do so too. In addition to the belief that Japan has an elevated status among other nations, KH does not

dismiss the fact that Japan itself is a country that was heavily influenced by the ancient East Asian civilization. Therefore, the usage of East Asian terms and beliefs are common in the community. Such are the references to Buddhism, the belief in karma, and yin and yang, which were introduced to Japan more than one thousand years ago but originated in India and China. However, KH claims that they are the ones that understand these concepts better than the majority of the public, even in the countries these concepts originate from.

The notion that Buddha has revealed himself to Jijji is considered to be a turning point in Jijji's life, and this encounter started a sequence that eventually led to KH's establishment. Buddhism, then, is integrated with the community's history. The community also defines itself in a Buddhist term by calling itself "a village of bodhisattvas". Besides Buddhism, other beliefs that originated in India, like the belief in human's karma, and the fact that people's spirits reincarnate, is also present in the daily community's conversations, meetings, and in the community's doctrine, yet with an original KH interpretation. The community refers to karma as the tendency of the person's personality and their ways of thinking and behaving, and not as a spiritual principle of act and effect as the original Indian term imply. Moreover, the person's karma could be measured by analyzing the Chinese characters of the name (which almost all Japanese have) by the Chinese concepts of yin and yang. Using these terms as measures of the personality and spirituality in KH points out the concept and assimilation of the community in the wider East Asian region, yet situate them as those who grasped the true essence of these concepts, as they are a community guided by the divine which communicates with their leader.

In conclusion, as described above, KH members hold spiritual beliefs which are heavily based on their identity as Japanese with strong national perceptions, according to which the Japanese people in general and KH members, in particular, have a significant role in the spiritual awakening of the rest of the world. This perception is based on a profound belief in the Shinto religion and in their original interpretations to it, on their faith in the Katakamuna civilization, who are their prehistorical ancestors, and on the role of Japan as the place which will be a utopian model for the rest of the world nations.

10. Discussion

When attempting to comprehend what are the nationalistic conceptions of Japanese New-new religions in the current era, KH makes a good example. Their nationalism, which stems from the belief that the Japanese are gifted with elevated spirituality compared to other nations, is similar to many other NNR. However, while some of their justifications for Japan's superiority are rooted in the Shinto religion and in the belief that Japan has a significant role as it will be the pure, heavenly place that all other nations will learn from, some of their beliefs of superiority are based on unique mythology which is yet to be recorded in any other NNR or spiritual group.

Seeing Japan as the spiritual center of the world is partially explained in KH by the Shinto belief in which the

9 In Japanese: 榑崎皋月

10 Yamato is an ancient name for Japan

gods have created Japan first. Although such explanation is not seen in other NNR, perceiving Japan as the spiritual center of the world was previously seen in Mahikari, which claims that humankind arose from Japan, in Kōfuku no Kagaku, which claims that Japan and the Japanese are the chosen people [5], and in Agonshū, in which Japan's centralism is suggested for the belief that it is the holy land of Buddha. Another idea that suggests Japan's superiority compared to other nations is based on the belief that Japan will be the prototype of a utopian country and set the guidelines for the rest of the world. In KH, their belief indicates that they are about to turn Japan into a heavenly model for the world to learn from. They believe that KH understands the spiritual concepts of Japan (as the Shinto holidays) and of East Asia (as the Buddhism, karma, and Ying and Yang) better than any other nation, and will spread this *truth* regarding these concepts first to Japan and then to the rest of the world. This belief aligns with Agonshū, and Byakko Shinkōkai ideas that world peace will rise from Japan [6,20] so that it will be a pioneer country for others to learn from.

Yet, the belief of an inherited responsibility for the spirituality of Japan and of the world as the descendants of a prehistoric civilization of high spiritual people who resided in Japan 13,000 years ago is unique to KH. While in other NNR, the spiritual supremacy of the Japanese subsists throughout the generations and in current times, according to KH, the spiritual level of Japanese decreased with time, and it is now their job to increase it back to the level the Katakamuna civilization used to have through *polishing the heart*. They strive to attain such spirituality, which is said to exist in the past, which is unique to KH, that sees the spiritual level of Japanese as dependent on their consciousness and subjective to deterioration if neglected. This idea of vicissitudes spirituality is unique to KH, which operates in the current era.

11. Conclusion

Beliefs of NNR in the superiority of Japan in the new era are similar to the doctrines prior to and during the time when the price bubble burst and the Japanese economy stagnated. Nationalism is still based on the belief that Japan is the spiritual center of the world and that world peace and utopian living will start in Japan and will influence the rest of the world. Yet, with no concrete achievements adding to the justification of the Japanese superiority, in KH, unique mythology regarding the Japanese inherited spiritual meliority was adopted and altered according to the decision of the community's leader. This belief somehow reminds of the Japanese Paleolithic hoax by Shinichi Fujimura, which indicated that Japan's Paleolithic period started earlier than anywhere else in Asia at around 700,000 BCE. However, while in Fujimura's case, there are pieces of evidence that prove the fabrication of the evidence, in KH's case, the belief in the Katakamuna civilization is based merely on faith, and therefore, cannot be refuted.

So far, while all NNR doctrines are based on faith, adding chapters to the Japanese prehistory should not come as a surprise when investigating KH. As new beliefs emerge, it is crucial to investigate what they represent and

what role it fulfills for the leaders and members of the NNR. In KH's case, the Katakamuna, as well as the demons in KH's interpretation of the Setsubun, should remind the members that although they have the responsibility in conveying and spreading high spirituality to Japan and to the world, they first need to improve their spirituality, which is inferior in the current society compared to the level it used to be in the past. It is now their obligation to *polish their hearts* and make spiritual progress in order to make Japan the heaven it should be so it can become a model for the rest of the world.

While Japanese religions attract new members by the cohesiveness of the group and a sense of self-definition and life purpose (as seen in the case of Aum Shinrikyō, see [26]), some may utilize their originality in their hybrid teachings to claim superiority over other NNR or spiritual groups. The mechanism which leads to the development of such doctrines and the mechanism which attracts members to one group and not to the other is beyond the scope of this paper and could be of interest to future researches on NNR in Japan.

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