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Contested Positioning: "New Religions" and Secular Spheres[1]

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Japanese new religions (*shinshūkyō*) have attempted to enter a wide range of secular domains, such as politics, education, and welfare, in order to offer alternative models to mainstream systems. This paper will discuss the importance placed by new religions on political and educational activities. In particular, it focuses on the activities of several new religions in the field of education, and their ideas on how the education system should be reformed to reflect the groups' teachings and ideologies. Following a general discussion of this topic, the paper addresses the case of Kōfuku no Kagaku, a new religion founded in the 1980s, which applied for permission to establish a new university in 2014. Kōfuku no Kagaku's response to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (Monbukagakushō) rejection of this application provides a pertinent case study to investigate the group's definition of learning and its vision of the role of education in society.

Keywords: education, higher education, Happy Science University, Kōfuku no Kagaku, Monbukagakushō, secularization, *shinshūkyō*

"New religions," or *shinshūkyō* 新宗教, is an umbrella term used to define a heterogeneous group of religious organizations that emerged in Japan from the nineteenth century onwards.[2] The "newness" attributed to these groups in the Japanese context is not necessarily associated with first generation membership, but rather with historical periods of emergence in relation to processes of modernization and transformations in Japanese society. Although membership varies greatly among groups, these movements represent a significant

1 The author would like to thank Ian Reader, Chiara Ghidini, the editors, and the anonymous reviewer for their helpful and constructive comments and criticism that greatly contributed to improving the final version of the paper.

2 In addition to *shinshūkyō*, other terms—such as "new new religions" (*shinshinshūkyō* 新新宗教), "new spiritual movements" (*shinreisei undō* 新霊性運動), "new spiritual culture" (*shinreisei bunka* 新霊性文化), "hyper-religion" (*haipā shūkyō* ハイパー宗教), and the more derogatory "cults" (*karuto* カルト)—have been introduced to distinguish movements established during the last three decades of the twentieth century from new religions formed in earlier periods. On Japanese new religions and terminology, see also Astley 2006; Inoue 1992; Inoue 2012; Reader 2005a; Reader 2015; Shimazono 1992; Shimazono 2001; Staemmler and Dehn 2011.

section of Japanese religious culture, with members from across diverse economic, social, and educational backgrounds.[3]

Concerning the topic of this special issue, a discussion of how new religions have been negotiating their role in secular domains could provide a relevant contribution to a wider discussion on "multiple secularities."[4] I am particularly interested in examining the dynamics of negotiation and, potentially, conflicts when new religions' interests in penetrating secular spheres collide with normative definitions of such spheres, that is with an institutional setting that limits the expression of religion in the public sphere, such as in politics and other cultural domains. This is also important in a context, such as postwar Japan, where the separation between religion and the state is enforced by the constitution and other laws. Indeed Article 20 of the Constitution of Japan guarantees freedom of religion, but also states that religious organizations shall not receive privileges from the state and cannot exercise political authority, thereby removing Shinto (and other religions) from the public sphere. However, this does not mean that religious organizations are barred from engaging in political or other public activities or forming political parties. For example, several organizations have actively supported candidates during elections and some have formed their own political parties (as with the case of Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, a Buddhist organization established in the 1930s, and its political party Kōmeitō 公明党 discussed later in this article).

Casanova distinguishes between different theories of secularization.[5] Secularization could, for example, be considered as the decline of religious beliefs and practices. However, as Mark Mullins proposes, modernization "can lead to secularization—the decline of some religions, beliefs, practices or institutions—but at the same time it may reinvigorate others and even create an environment in which new forms of religion can flourish."[6] Another thesis, Casanova notes, considers secularization as the retreat of religion from the public sphere and the privatization of religion. Finally, secularization is conceptualized as "differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms."[7]

It is this latter aspect, which Casanova argues is the "defensible core" of the theory of secularization, that is particularly relevant to the discussion in this article. In particular, in examining the "culturally and symbolically, as well as institutionally anchored forms and arrangements of differentiation between religion and other social spheres," it is important to discuss religious organizations' views of their role in society, as well as their potential challenges to the aforementioned differentiation of domains.[8]

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3 In recent years, scholars have problematized the category of new religions, discussing, for example, the opportunity to analyze Buddhist new movements in the broader framework of Japanese Buddhism. The movements themselves are not necessarily comfortable with the category. However, the category is still widely used in scholarship and public discourse about religion in contemporary Japan. For a discussion on this issue, see Reader 2015. The conceptual category of "religion" (*shūkyō* 宗教) itself has also been at the center of several scholarly debates (see for example, Fitzgerald 2000; Isomae 2003; Josephson 2012; Pye 2003; Reader 2005b; Shimazono and Tsuruoka 2004).

4 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012.

5 See for example Casanova 1994; Casanova 2006; Casanova 2011; Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012.

6 Mullins 2012, p. 63.

7 Casanova 2006, p. 12.

8 Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012, p. 881. For a critical examination of the discussion regarding the compatibility of religion and modernity see Asad 1999.

After a short overview of early scholarly discussions about new religions in relation to secularization theory, this paper will discuss the importance placed by new religions on political and educational activities, in order to offer their alternative models to mainstream systems. In particular, the discussion will focus on the interest shown by several new religions in the field of education, and on how the education system should be reformed to reflect the groups' teachings and ideologies. In this context the case of Kōfuku no Kagaku 幸福の科学 (lit. Science of Happiness, but also known under the English name Happy Science), a new religion founded in the 1980s, will be discussed as a significant case study. Kōfuku no Kagaku has been particularly eager to promote its activities in politics and education, but at the same time firmly supports a non-secular view of these spheres and explicitly argues for religiously informed politics and education. In particular, the group's response to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (Monbukagakushō 文部科学省, hereafter MEXT) rejection in Autumn 2014 of its application to establish a new university provides a pertinent case study to investigate the group's definition of learning and its vision of the role of education in society.

Japanese New Religions and Secularization: Between "Heresy" and "Secular Religions"

Since the Meiji period, new religions have been discussed in the context of the role of religion in modern society and the definition of religion itself or, more precisely, of what kind of "religion" could be considered acceptable in a modern society.[9] New religions are usually organized around a charismatic leader or founder, and therefore promote alternative forms of authority that could challenge secular authority. Sawada analyzed this issue through the example of Renmonkyō 蓮門教, a short-lived group established in 1883 by Shimamura Mitsu 島村みつ (1831–1904), which in the late nineteenth century became one of the largest new religious organizations.[10] Renmonkyō became the object of a defamatory campaign by a popular newspaper called *Yorozu chōhō* 萬朝報 which accused it of heterodoxy and heteropraxis and labeled it "perverted, evil teaching" (*inshi jakyō* 淫祠邪教).

As shown by Sawada, during the Meiji period new religions represented a form of "religious otherness" that was used as a contrast to—and hence served as a defining mechanism in the construction of—Japanese religious orthodoxy.[11] As such, they were used by ideologists and public moralists in a process similar to what Mandair and Dressler define as "religion-making from above," that is an "authoritative discourse and practices that define and confine things" and in which religion becomes an instrument to "legitimize certain politics and positions of power."[12] In this process, rapidly expanding organizations such as Renmonkyō and, later on, Tenrikyō 天理教 (a religious organization established in the mid 19th century that will be discussed later in this article) were perceived by bureaucrats, social educators, sectarian leaders, and media as threatening and were accused of being superstitious on account of their use of magical healing and practices. Later, in the period before and during the Second World War, religious organizations that were not affiliated with one of the thirteen legally approved sect Shinto (*kyōha shintō* 教派神道) sects were

9 See for example Inoue 1992; Inoue 2012; Reader 2005a; Reader 2015; Shimazono 1992; Shimazono 2001.
10 On Renmonkyō see also Dorman 2012; Inoue 1992; Takeda 1991.
11 Sawada 2004, p. 236.
12 Mandair and Dressler 2011, p. 21.

considered suspicious, and closely monitored by the authorities. In some cases, such as that of Oomoto 大本, a religious organization established in the late 19th century by Deguchi Nao 出口なお (1836–1918) and Deguchi Onisaburō 出口王仁三郎 (1871–1948), they were suppressed.[13]

In the postwar period, the mass media and politicians portrayed dynamic religious movements able to attract adherents from different social groups, such as Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō, as a menace to the "postwar orthodoxy of a strict division between religion and state" and attacked them for their teachings and proselytization practices.[14] Sōka Gakkai and its connection with Kōmeitō are recurrently used as a key example in the debate regarding the separation of religion and the state in Japan.[15] After the 1995 sarin gas attack perpetrated by members of the new religion Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教, the designation of new religions as "dangerous others" and "cults" has become increasingly prevalent.[16] The Aum Affair (*Oumu jiken* オウム事件) affected negatively the image of religion in general in Japan. In particular, journalists, politicians, and some scholars leveled further criticism toward new religions. They labeled their practices and beliefs as "irrational" and "dangerous"; as a consequence, new religions became "more defensive and cautious in the public sphere." [17]

It should be noted here that interpretations of new religions, and especially their associations with modernity, have changed over time. Whereas in the post-Aum era the main discourse has centered around portraying such movements as "irrational" and antithetical to a modern, rationalized, and secular society, in the 1960s they were perceived rather differently. It is not the main purpose of this paper to provide an in-depth discussion of the debate about secularization theories in the Japanese context. However, it should be noted that in earlier studies, in which "secularization" was mainly considered as the decline of religious practices, beliefs, and institutions in relation to the expansion of modernity, new religions were often cited as examples of the ability of religion to adapt to a modern environment. For instance, Davis saw the emergence of religious movements in Japan as being at odds with the decline of "the sacred":

> A large number of religious movements have emerged in recent decades that give us pause when tempted to pronounce glibly on the universal decline of the sacred. The New Religions in Japan, not to mention the Neo-Evangelical movement, astrology, occultism, and youth cults in the United States, are typical examples.[18]

As Davis points out elsewhere, the emergence of new religions was also in contrast with surveys indicating the decline of religion: "The period when our 'hardest' statistical evidence indicates a decline of religious belief in Japan coincides paradoxically with the phenomenal growth of the so-called New Religions." [19] This paradox, in Davis's opinion,

13 Murakami 1980. On Oomoto's suppression by the government, see also Stalker 2008.
14 For a general discussion of this issue and for examples of such attacks, see McLaughlin 2012a, p. 58.
15 These issues are discussed in Ehrhardt, Klein, McLaughlin, and Reed 2014. On Kōmeitō, see also Fisker-Nielsen 2012.
16 On the post-Aum negative representations of new religions see Baffelli and Reader 2012; Baffelli 2016.
17 Baffelli and Reader 2012, p. 20.
18 Davis 1980, p. 10.
19 Davis 1992, p. 247.

is a confirmation that non-belief shown by the survey should be considered as "largely *situational*" and "symptomatic of that existential drift for which the Japanese have such talent, rather than any disciplined, philosophical commitment to atheism."[20] Similarly, Yamanaka and Hayashi use the persistence of new religions and their developments to advocate the necessity of going beyond a secularization theory based on the idea of the decline of religion.[21]

Sociologist of religion Shimazono Susumu also interprets new religions as products of modern society and a response to the loss of control by the "religion of the elite":

> Where the religion of the elite lost sway, salvific religious movements came to life from out of the religion of the masses and assumed a posture of secularization (as happened in the United States, Korea, and Japan). New religious movements can thus be seen as developmental modes of popular religion liberating itself from bondage to elite culture and adjusting to modern environments.[22]

The notion of new religions as an example of the adaptation of religion was also endorsed by Wilson, who defined new religions (not only in the Japanese context) as "testimonies to secularization" which "often use highly secular methods in evangelism, financing, publicity, and mobilization of adherents."[23] Casanova, too, cites the Japanese new religions and what he terms Japan's several "rush hours of the gods" in the context of an argument for rethinking the nature of secularization.[24] In arguing that secularization does not mean the disappearance of religion, and that a general theory of secularization may not be possible, he describes Japan as being "one the most secular societies on earth while being at the same time extremely hospitable to all kinds of religions."[25] Mullins, however, while recognizing the importance of new religions in the postwar period as "dynamic movements of resacralization," invites us to be cautious about overemphasizing their social role.[26]

Wilson and other scholars suggest that new religions have a role as intermediaries between individuals and "the state," by providing welfare and social networking, and engaging with several secular domains, such as politics, education, and welfare.[27] These religions are also well known for their intensive use of secular marketing techniques and media communication to promote their image, to attract new members, and to create the image of a leader whose charisma is also connected to entrepreneurial qualities.[28] Hardacre, in her work on Kurozumikyō 黒住教, a religious organization established in the mid 19th

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20 Davis 1992, p. 248.
21 Yamanaka and Hayashi 1995.
22 Shimazono 2004, p. 164. See also Shimazono 1992.
23 Wilson 1991, p. 204.
24 "Rush hour of the gods" refers to the title of a book on new religions published by Neil McFarland in 1967 and to the expression "rush hour of the gods" (*kamigami no rasshu awā* 神々のラッシュアワー) that appeared in the press to indicate an apparent increase in the numbers of new religions following the introduction of the Religious Corporations Law (*Shūkyō hōjin hō* 宗教法人法) in 1951.
25 Casanova 1994, pp. 242–43. On Casanova's critique of secularization theories, see also Casanova 2011. For a critique of Casanova's approach, see Reader 2012.
26 Mullins 2012, p. 68.
27 Wilson 1991. See also McLaughlin 2012b.
28 Stalker 2008; on the use of media see also Baffelli 2016.

century, argues that new religions share with secular society paths (or "ways," *michi* 道 in Japanese) of self-cultivation, while offering more efficient organizational structures:

> The paths of self-cultivation constructed by new religions may prescribe different observances, but in essence their intent and import is the same as the *michi* of secular society. The major differences lie in greater organizational efficiency of channeling people through the path, counselling and other forms of socialization along the way, and systematic rewards for good performance.[29]

From this point of view, new religions could be interpreted as a challenge to narrow views of "religion" that are only concerned with private piety and as something separate from the public sphere. As Hardacre shows, new religions may well be engaged with secular society and share many of its values.

New religions themselves have been reshaping their images over the years, often opting for moving away from defining themselves as "religions," or at least attempting to promote themselves as "secularized religions." Some groups, especially after 1995 but also earlier, have attempted to brand themselves as "nonreligious."[30] For example, Kōfuku no Kagaku, the organization that will be discussed later in this article, initially presented itself as a study group, while other organizations chose names that refer to secular institutions, such as Panawave Kenkyūjo パナウェーブ研究所 (Panawave Laboratory), or claimed that their techniques are proven effective by modern scientific methods. In her analysis of the Organization for Industrial, Spiritual, and Cultural Advancement (OISCA), a Japanese NGO which derives from a Shinto-based new religion called Ananaikyō 三五教, Watanabe discusses how the organization downplays its connection with the religious group from which it derived, in order to assert that its work is "nonreligious."[31] One reason for this is the wish to avoid being associated with negative images of religion, especially in the post-1995 period.

Japanese new religions appear to be secularized in many respects. As suggested by Matsunaga, their organizational structure recalls that of larger companies and they operate in many similar ways, for example by offering rewards to members and demanding their time.[32] Some of them also present their teachings or practices as a way to achieve success in business, recognition, or wealth, and to provide members with "means to achieve prestige and recognition that parallel those available to men employed by large corporations."[33]

At the same time, however, the alternative visions promoted by new religions often imply a strong criticism of modern secular life, which is seen as corrupted, or as insufficient

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29 Hardacre 1986, pp. 27–28.

30 On this topic, see also the articles by Gagné and Rots in this special issue. The group discussed by Gagné, for example, has introduced "secular" rituals to eliminate "the stink of religion" (*shūkyō kusai mono o nakusu* 宗教臭いものをなくす).

31 Watanabe 2013; Watanabe 2015.

32 Matsunaga 2000, p. 36. Similarities between the organizational structure of religious institutions and companies could also be noted in older established organizations, such as Buddhist sects. This is partly due to the fact that religious institutions need to fulfill criteria established by the Religious Corporations Law (*Shūkyō hōjin hō*) in order to be legally registered as religious organizations, including having specific structures such as official representatives and so on. I am grateful to Ian Reader for this comment.

33 Hardacre 1986, p. 193.

to respond to the deeper needs of people. As a consequence, movements promote reforms of secular educational, political, and economic systems that are based on their doctrinal tenets and not necessary in agreement with secular definitions of these spheres. In most cases these visions and reforms remain part of doctrinal and rhetorical discourses, and do not translate into concrete plans. In some cases, however, they have led to the establishment of political parties or schools.[34]

Secularist attitudes are not just discursive strategies; they form a vital part of the dynamics of new religions. As pointed out by McLaughlin in his study of Sōka Gakkai, new religions may challenge the "traditional parameters" of religion.[35] Indeed, if we only look at the elements characterizing these groups that appear more "religious," such as doctrines or similarities to other traditions, we risk overlooking the centrality of other practices that are vital elements of members' engagement and of the expansion dynamics of these organizations. For example, McLaughlin argues that one of the key elements in the success of Sōka Gakkai in the postwar period was its ability to position itself as an alternative to society while, at the same time, sharing mainstream society's goals and structures: "A key reason for Sōka Gakkai's unprecedented appeal, one that has been largely overlooked, has been its focus on constructing itself as an alternative means of social engagement by providing its members with opportunities to participate in multiple institutions that mirror those in mainstream Japanese society."[36]

At times, secular institutions are replicated in the organizational structure of the group, such as the above-mentioned company-like structure or the use of an examination system to enter the group or to achieve higher membership status.[37] An extreme case was provided by Aum Shinrikyō, which appointed "ministers," mirroring political institutions and creating a sort of state within the state.[38] In doing so, the organization aimed at separating itself from mainstream society, which was seen as corrupted and as an obstacle to the group's mission.

New religions have been promoting activities, such as arts initiatives and political actions, which replicate secular institutions and practices. By doing this, groups offer their members alternative modes of "national belonging."[39] In particular, politics and education have been important fields to promote alternative views to the mainstream system. For example, Kōfuku no Kagaku aims at the creation of Utopia, an idealized world regulated by the leader's teaching. It posits the development of an "adjunct nation" in ways similar to what McLaughlin describes in the case of Sōka Gakkai: "a nation-like apparatus that replicates the morphological features of the modern nation within its own institutions."[40]

34 Sōka Gakkai's political activities led to the formation of a successful political party in 1964, Kōmeitō, renamed Shin Kōmeitō 新公明党 in 1998. Although religious content and language have been removed from the party's political program since the 1970s, initially it was founded on the idea of a "Buddhist democracy" (*buppō minshushugi* 仏法民主主義), that was promoted as "true democracy" and advocated the role of religion as the basis of politics, aiming at the realization of a "fusion of politics and religion" (*ōbutsu myōgō* 王仏冥合). Initially, Buddhist terminology was used extensively to promote the party and to justify Sōka Gakkai's decision to enter the political arena. On this topic, see Nakano 2003 and Tsukada 2015.

35 McLaughlin 2012b.

36 McLaughlin 2012b p. 277.

37 Kōfuku no Kagaku too, among others, has used this system, especially in the early period of formation.

38 Established in 1984 by Asahara Shōkō 麻原彰晃 (born 1955) as a small yoga centre, Aum developed into a complex organization influenced by Buddhist teachings and catastrophic millenarian thought.

39 McLaughlin 2009, p. 343.

40 McLaughlin 2012b, p. 276.

Kōfuku no Kagaku conceives the construction of Utopia as an individual project, aimed at attaining individual happiness through Ōkawa's teaching; the process will eventually impact on the collective and lead to a transformation of society and its members.

In other words, new religions engage with modern society and adopt seemingly secular orientations and policies, in ways that challenge normative assumptions about the contrast between religion and the secular. Indeed, recent studies have discussed how political activism is an important element in the structure of several new religions.[41] An area that has been given little consideration, and which this paper seeks to readdress, is that of education, which provides an interesting example for the discussion of the ambivalence of the discourse on new religions and secularization. Some groups, for example, may use education, as value added to their spiritual teaching, to create what Whelan defined as secular "camouflage."[42]

New Religions and Higher Education

During the Meiji period small private schools focusing on women's education and English teaching were established in Japan by missionaries from various British and American Protestant denominations. In the period between 1886 and 1888 Buddhist denominations opened several educational institutions as well, but they were generally aimed at training monks, not at providing general education.[43] In 1899, permission to provide private education was granted by the Private School Ordinance (*Shiritsu gakkō rei* 私立学校令). In the same year the Ministry of Education also issued Order Number 12 (*Kunrei dai 12-gō* 訓令第12号), which formulated the separation of religion and education, prohibiting religious education in schools.[44] Education became an important part of state activities and religious institutions, in particular Buddhist and Christian organizations.[45] In 1947 the Fundamental Law of Education (*Kyōiku kihon hō* 教育基本法) was enacted. Article 9 (now Article 15) stipulated the separation of secular public education from religion, stating: "The schools established by the national and local governments shall refrain from religious education or other activities for a specific religion."[46] As a consequence, religious education as a subject

41 On new religions and politics, see Ehrhardt, Klein, McLaughlin, and Reed 2014; Nakano 2003; Tsukada 2015.

42 Whelan investigates how the God Light Association (GLA), a new religion founded in the late 1960s by Takahashi Shinji 高橋信次 (1927–1976), overtly appears as a secular organization. For example, the group organizes expensive seminars and events in convention centers that resemble business meetings or academic gatherings, with forms to fill in and participants dressed in suits, avoiding religious rituals and using school metaphors to promote itself as a school or alternative education system "re-infused with the sacred." See Whelan 2010.

43 Hayashi 2014.

44 Hayashi 2014. For details see also Kate Wildman Nakai's article in this special issue.

45 In 1918 the government issued the University Ordinance (*Daigaku rei* 大学令) and officially recognized private universities. As discussed in Nakai's article in this special issue, negotiations between Buddhist and Christian religious institutions and the government were not uniform. In the case of Sophia University (Jōchi Daigaku 上智大学), for example, founded by the Society of Jesus in 1913, the Jesuits decided to respond to the prohibition of religious education with a "strategy of prudence and compartmentalization" (Nakai, 2015, p. 22; see also Nakai's article in this special issue). From the very beginning, religion was excluded from the classroom, but present in other spaces, such as dormitories. Furthermore, through ethics classes the Jesuits "identified ways to present [their] worldview as compatible with the government's concern that educational institutions produce loyal members of the Japanese state" (Nakai, 2015, p. 22; Nakai's article in this special issue). Order Number 12 was abolished immediately after the end of World War II allowing religiously affiliated schools to introduce religious education and activities, such as ceremonies and prayers.

46 See http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/kihon/data/07080117.htm (accessed 23 July 2016).

of study was removed from public schools. Nowadays only education in religious knowledge (*shūkyō chishiki kyōiku* 宗教知識教育) is allowed in public schools, while sectarian religious education (*shūha kyōiku* 宗派教育) and education in "religious sentiment" (*shūkyōteki jōsō kyōiku* 宗教的情操教育) are permitted in private religious schools alone.[47]

With regard to new religions, an interest in education reform was already noticeable in the early period of their development. For example, Oomoto's co-founder, Deguchi Onisaburō, expressed severe criticism of the compulsory education system because, in his opinion, it included too many subjects taught only superficially. In 1916, the group was renamed Kōdō Oomoto 皇道大本 (Oomoto of the Imperial Way), advocating the "restoration of divine rule" (*shinsei fukko* 神政復古) and the "unity of rites and government" (*saisei itchi* 祭政一致).[48] Onisaburō also supported reforms of the education system that promoted teaching specialist skills and aimed to "establish a national curriculum based on the Ancient Imperial Way."[49]

Several new religions promoted education programs, and in some cases their interest in education resulted in them founding schools and universities.[50] The two major examples of new religions that established educational institutions from elementary through university are Tenrikyō and Sōka Gakkai. Tenrikyō, founded in the mid 19th century by Nakayama Miki 中山みき, established the Tenri Foreign Language School (Tenri Gaikokugo Senmon Gakkō 天理外国語専門学校) in 1925. The project was implemented by the second leader (Shinbashira 真柱) Nakayama Shōzen 中山正善 (1905–1967) in order to train missionaries for overseas missions.[51] The school included a Department of Korean Studies which, according to the group's publications, was established after a difficult negotiation with the government.[52] This school eventually became Tenri University in 1949. Currently the main faculties are Human Studies (*ningengakubu* 人間学部), Letters (*bungakubu* 文学部), International Studies (*kokusaigakubu* 国際学部), and Sport Studies (*taiikugakubu* 体育学部). The "founding spirit of the university" (*kengaku no seishin* 建学の精神) referred to the "Joyous Life" (*yōki gurashi* 陽気ぐらし) path established by Tenrikyō's founder:

> Oyasama, Tenrikyō's foundress, revealed the existence of God the Parent, clarifying the truth that human beings are all brothers and sisters, and demonstrating a way of life of helping one another through the path of the "Divine Model." The mission of the University, based upon the teachings of Oyasama, is to cultivate human resources that will contribute to the construction of the world of the "Joyous Life."[53]

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47 It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail recent debates regarding religious education in Japan and the revisions of the Fundamental Law on Education. It is important to note, however, that the most controversial aspect of the law has been the education in religious sentiment and whether it should be introduced, in some form, in public education. On the debate, see Dessì 2013; Filus 2006; Inoue 2009; Tsujimura 2007.

48 Stalker 2008, p. 63.

49 Stalker 2008, p. 69.

50 Several new religions are running middle and high schools, for example Konkōkyō 金光教, Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, Reiyūkai 霊友会, and PL Kyōdan パーフェクトリバティー教団. See Inoue et al. 1994, pp. 574–75 for a list of schools affiliated to new religions.

51 Shinbashira (literally "central pillar") is the name used for a spiritual leader in Tenrikyō.

52 Tenrikyo Overseas Mission Department 1998, p. 122.

53 See http://www.tenri-u.ac.jp/en/ariirh0000000760.html. The Japanese webpage is available at http://www.tenri-u.ac.jp/info/index.html (Both accessed 9 March 2016). See also Dōyūsha 1981, pp. 366–80.

Figure 1. View of Soka University of America (SUA), Aliso Viejo, California. Pamphlet "Soka Gakkai International". An Introduction Soka Gakkai International, 2010, p. 14.

However, despite the fact that the founding principles are based on Tenrikyō's teachings, the university promotes itself as a leading institution for language and sport studies. The Faculty of Human Studies includes a Department of Religious Studies where Tenrikyō's theology is studied alongside other religions traditions.

Sōka Gakkai is a lay Buddhist movement founded in 1930 by an educator, Makiguchi Tsunesaburō 牧口常三郎 (1871–1944). Educational reform was at the core of the group's early development, as is clear from its name: "Value Creating Study Association." It was initially called Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai 創価教育学会 or "Value Creating Educational Association". Dissatisfied with Japan's mainstream educational system, Makiguchi's organization aimed to offer to less privileged members of society an opportunity to study and learn, and consequently a way to be included in mainstream society. In 1968, Sōka Gakkai opened its first middle and high schools in Tokyo. Sōka Daigaku 創価大学 was established in 1971, in order to accommodate the first graduating class of Sōka High School.[54] Nowadays the group has a private educational system from preschool to university and also educational institutions overseas, such as Soka University of America (SUA), opened in 2001 in Aliso Viejo in California (figure 1).[55] Faculties at Sōka Daigaku include Economics (*keizaigakubu* 経済学部), Business Administration (*keieigabu* 経営学部), Law (*hōgakubu* 法学部), Letters (*bungakubu* 文学部), Education (*kyōikugakubu* 教育学部), Engineering (*rikōgakubu* 理工学部), Nursing (*kangogakubu* 看護学部), and International Liberal Arts (*kokusai kyōyōgakubu* 国際教養学部).[56] The university mission statement refers to the founder's original idea of "creating value" (*sōka* 創価) and to the leading principle established by Ikeda Daisaku 池田大作 (born 1928), who became Sōka Gakkai's third president in 1960: "Be the highest seat of learning for humanistic education / Be the cradle of a new culture / Be a fortress for the peace of humankind."[57] However, the curriculum of degrees offered is not dissimilar to those in nonconfessional universities.

In both examples, new religions have created alternatives to public universities, with an "added spiritual value" of educational guidelines based on the group's teachings. At the same time, however, the training is similarly structured and the goals are commensurable to those of secular universities. In other words, the religious organizations have been able to adapt

54 For an account of the establishment of the university from the point of view of Sōka Gakkai, see Ikeda 2008.
55 Established as an independent nonprofit organization in 1987, a four-year liberal college was opened in 2001 and was accredited in 2005.
56 See https://www.soka.ac.jp/ (accessed 23 July 2016).
57 See https://www.soka.ac.jp/en/about/philosophy/mission/ (accessed 23 July 2016).

themselves to secular definitions and expectations of higher education. It is also important to note that both universities aim to attract students that are not necessarily members of the religious organization, and have opted for promoting an image of universities based on religious principles, but not focused on sectarian teachings.

For instance, Sōka Gakkai's account of the foundation of the new university emphasizes that the leader did not believe in religion as part of the educational process, but rather "he wished to establish a new university that provided a fully humanistic education with Buddhism as its philosophical bedrock."[58] As in the case of its relationship with Kōmeitō, Sōka Gakkai carefully presented Sōka Daigaku as separate from the religious organization. Ikeda, for example, did not make an official visit to the university when it opened.[59]

Kōfuku no Kagaku offers an example of a very different approach to the negotiation between new religions and so-called secular spheres, and to the definition of education in schools and universities. A small number of studies have investigated the cultural nationalism trends in Kōfuku no Kagaku and its political activities.[60] However, although education is mentioned in other works as one of the main areas of interest for the group, little attention has been paid to the topic.[61] Kōfuku no Kagaku makes for a good case study because it is a leading new religion in late twentieth-century Japan, and it is a movement that has increased its participation in politics and education over the last few years, in the post-Aum era. Central to this is the movement's plan to found a university, Happy Science University, which I will discuss in the following section.

Kōfuku no Kagaku and Education

Kōfuku no Kagaku was founded in 1986 by Ōkawa Ryūhō 大川隆法 (born 1956), a graduate of Tokyo University. Shimazono has referred to Kōfuku no Kagaku and other contemporary new religions as examples of the "anti-secularism" (*hansezokushugi* 反世俗主義) that developed in the post-1980s, and he has discussed the movement's emphasis on religious values in politics, education, and economics.[62] Ōkawa already expressed these ideas in early publications, such as the text *Yūtopia kachi kakumei* ユートピア価値革命 (The Utopian Value Revolution) published in 1989, criticizing the school system for not teaching the most important lessons for humanity, such as that human life is eternal.

As mentioned previously, political and other public activities play a central role in many new religions. Similarly, for Kōfuku no Kagaku's members, political, educational, and economic activities are an essential aspect of their practice and they are all part of the vision of building a utopian society on earth, merging religious objectives and this-worldly goals. This point is emphasized by Shimazono, who says:

58 Ikeda 2008, p. 98.
59 See Ikeda 2008, p. 134. The text also mentions the criticisms received by Sōka Gakkai in the early 1970s as one of the reasons for maintaining a separation between the university and the religious organization.
60 See in particular Tsukada 2012; Tsukada 2015; Klein 2012; Schrimpf 2008; Shimazono 2001.
61 In particular Shimazono raises some interesting points regarding Kōfuku no Kagaku's views on education in his discussion about nationalism and new religions. See Shimazono 2001, pp. 104–105.
62 Shimazono 2001, pp. 104, 229–36.

> [Kōfuku no Kagaku] encourages the "Utopian Value Revolution" to change entirely the present social order, including politics, economics and education, and to promote an order emphasizing religious values. In politics, for example, elements of moral excellence should be incorporated into the democratic mechanism. In the economy, divine values should be applied to price, interest rate and tax systems in place of the simple exchange of equivalents. In education, the purpose of life, the importance of love and the value of eternal life should be taught as high priorities.[63]

The group developed its utopian mission over the years with the foundation of a political party in 2008 (Kōfuku Jitsugentō 幸福実現党, Happiness Realization Party) and the establishment of schools in 2010 and 2013. The focus on education has been central in Kōfuku no Kagaku since the very beginning. Initially the group presented itself as a study group on human happiness and referred to itself as a "graduate school of life" (*jinsei no daigakuin* 人生の大学院) rather than as a religious organization.[64] Early publications stated that the aim of the "Science of Happiness" (*kōfuku no kagaku*) was "the scientific investigation of 'happiness,'" and defined the religious person as a "scientist of the world of the heart."[65] Publications in English describe the Institute for the Research in Human Happiness (IRH—that is, the former English name used by Kōfuku no Kagaku) as a research center whose teaching focuses on Buddhist principles and aims to create leaders for society:

> The teachings of IRH are based on the spirit of Buddhism. The two main pillars are the attainment of spiritual wisdom and the practice of "love that gives." Members learn Buddha's Truth (the Law) through books, lectures and seminars to acquire knowledge of spiritual views of life and world. They also practice meditation and self-reflection daily, based on the Truth they have learned; this is the way to develop a deeper understanding of life and build characters worthy of being leaders in society who can contribute to the development of the world.[66]

In 1986 the group introduced an examination system: applicants had to pass an exam based on Ōkawa's books to be admitted as members.[67] Subsequently, members' training was developed through residential training courses (*kenshūkai* 研修会), which even now are still important. Furthermore, members were divided hierarchically into different levels (up to the level of instructor, *kōshi* 講師) through qualification seminars (*shikaku seminā* 資格セミナー).

The group has changed drastically over the years, and has transformed itself from a study group into a religious organization. In 1991 it received Japanese government recognition under the Religious Corporations Law (*Shūkyō hōjin hō*). However, it has retained an emphasis on study in its publications and its leader's speeches, as well as in the organization's seminars and training courses. Education, study, and learning are fundamental parts of Kōfuku no Kagaku's training and doctrine. Recognizing this fact is

63 Shimazono 2004, pp. 270–71.
64 Astley 1995, p. 357.
65 See, respectively, Ōkawa 1992, p. 8; Ōkawa 1986, p. 17.
66 This text appeared in several publications by Kōfuku no Kagaku in the 1990s, such as IRH Monthly, Kōfuku no Kagaku's monthly journal in English (now Happy Science Monthly).
67 On the examination system, see also Astley 1995; Nijū Isseiki Bunmei Kenkyūkai 1991.

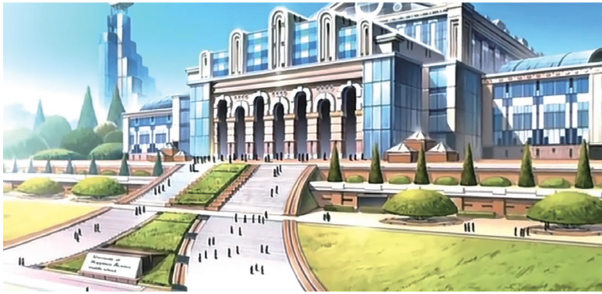

Figure 2. Still image from the movie *Ōgon no hō* (The Golden Laws), 2003 (Ōkawa 2003).

Figure 3. Satoru and Arisa, the two major characters in the animation movie *Ōgon no hō* (The Golden Laws), 2003. Advertising poster distributed with film tickets in 2003 (Ōkawa 2003).

crucial for understanding the movement's recent activities and developments. The idea of building schools connected to the group had already appeared in media texts produced by Kōfuku no Kagaku in the early part of the first decade of the twenty-first century. In the movement's animation movie, *Ōgon no hō* (The Golden Laws) screened in 2003, for example, the main character, Satoru サトル, lives in a twenty-fifth-century city of the future, New Atlantis ニューアトランティス, and is an elite student at a middle school which is part of the University of Happy Science (figures 2 and 3). His dream is to be admitted to the prestigious academy to be trained as a religious minister. The representations of the school in the film, including the architecture of the campus (which recalls the buildings of the boarding school built by Kōfuku no Kagaku a few years later), seem to confirm that the investment in educational facilities initiated in 2010 was part of a long term plan. It shows that discussions about educational reform had previously circulated in the group also through visual culture.

Happy Science University, HSU

In 2010, Kōfuku no Kagaku established Kōfuku no Kagaku Gakuen 幸福の科学学園 (Happy Science Academy) in Nasu town, Tochigi Prefecture, a boarding school that includes a junior and senior high school (figure 4).[68] In the same year a new division for the establishment of a university (*Kōfuku no Kagaku Daigaku Junbishitsu* 幸福の科学大学準備室) was formed and started working toward the opening of a new university in spring 2015.[69] In 2013, a Kansai branch of the Kōfuku no Kagaku Gakuen with a combined junior-senior high school opened in Ōtsu City, Shiga Prefecture.[70] Kōfuku no Kagaku Gakuen has been granted the status of "educational corporation" (*gakkō hōjin*) by the government, and therefore its curriculum follows the standard curriculum of other Japanese high schools and emphasizes preparation for university entrance exams. However, religious practices,

68 See http://www.happy-science.ac.jp/index.html (accessed 23 July 2016).
69 The name in English used by the group is Preparatory Office for Establishing Happy Science University.
70 See http://kansai.happy-science.ac.jp/ (accessed 23 July 2016).

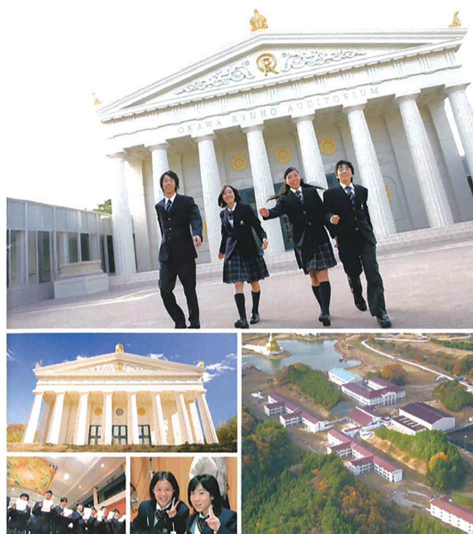

Figure 4. Images of Kōfuku no Kagaku Gakuen, Nasu, Tochigi Prefecture. Pamphlet "Happy Science. Master Ryuho Okawa," Happy Science Public Relations Division, n.d., p. 16.

such as morning and evening prayers, are included in the students' daily schedule, and participation in religious events is integrated in the school calendar. Furthermore, the school's advertising material emphasizes that religious education *(shūkyō kyōiku* 宗教教育) is taught in addition to moral education (*dōtoku kyōiku* 道徳教育). It also stresses that such religious values, which form the basis of Kōfuku no Kagaku's educational principles, will efficiently address issues such as bullying and create a harmonious learning environment. This will eventually transform Japan and the world into a utopia. The educational emphasis is on the creation of talents, a "true elite" (*shinnaru erīto* 真なるエリート) that will enter prestigious universities in Japan and make Kōfuku no Kagaku renowned.[71]

Happy Science University (*Kōfuku no Kagaku Daigaku* 幸福の科学大学, hereafter HSU) was conceived as a continuation of the educational process started at high school. The initial plan was that the university would welcome the first cohort of students who graduated from the high school. The construction of a university campus in the town of Chōsei in Chiba Prefecture was completed in 2014 (figure 5). Kōfuku no Kagaku developed a plan for the university that included the establishment of three faculties: the Faculty of Human Happiness (*Ningen kōfuku gakubu* 人間幸福学部), the Faculty of Successful Management (*Keiei seikō gakubu* 経営成功学部), and the Faculty of Future Industry (*Mirai sangyō gakubu* 未来産業学部). In 2014, the group also started the international recruitment of teachers for courses taught in English.

HSU promotional material talked of applying Kōfuku no Kagaku's philosophy to education, and emphasized that the spiritual foundation of the university was located in the "search for happiness and the creation of a new civilization" (*kōfuku no tankyū to shinbunmei no sōzō* 幸福の探求と新文明の創造). Videos introduced the project during events and ceremonies, and members supported it with a new "prayer for the successful establishment of Kōfuku no Kagaku University" (*Kōfuku no Kagaku Daigaku setsuritsu daiseikō kigan* 幸福の科学大学設立大成功祈願).[72] Kōfuku no Kagaku presented the university as part of an "education revolution" (*kyōiku kakumei* 教育革命). Its mission is summarized in three points: to be "the foundation stone for utopia" (*yūtopia no ishizue* ユートピアの礎) that will

71 Advertising material for the schools, as well as presentations of their curricula and schedules of activities are available in several publications and online. See for example: http://www.happy-science.ac.jp/index.html; http://kansai.happy-science.ac.jp/ (both accessed 23 July 2016); Ōkawa 2014a, p. 110.

72 In July 2014, I visited two Kōfuku no Kagaku centers in Kyushu, where the prayer was recited during the morning ceremonies. The promotional video was shown during a ceremony I attended at the Yufuin Shōshinkan (one of the head temples in Kyushu) in Oita Prefecture.

produce a new elite of talents; to be "the foundation for the creation of the future nation" (*mirai kokka sōzō no kiso* 未来国家創造の基礎), a new country based on religious values and prosperity; and, finally, to be "the origin of a new civilization" (*shinbunmei no genryū* 新文明の源流), which will also produce a new culture.[73] The university therefore represents a significant step towards the creation of a new type of scholarship based on Ōkawa's teachings. It also forms the basis for fostering new talents and a new civilization, that is, utopia on earth.

Figure 5. View of the main building of Happy Science University, Chiba Prefecture. Photo taken by the author.

In a work published in 2013, Ōkawa criticized Japanese university-level education, accusing it of lacking a pragmatic approach and creativity. Some of his comments echoed recent declarations by Shimomura Hakubun 下村博文, at the time Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, about the lack of internationalization in Japanese universities. Ōkawa agreed that it is important for Japanese students to be competitive in the global market and insists on the need to go beyond current approaches, in order to make a "contribution to the future" (*mirai e no kōken* 未来への貢献).[74] Furthermore, he advocated the study of religion as a prerequisite for becoming a future leader and proposed the "Faculty of Human Happiness" as the foundation stone for the creation not only of new learning, but also of an ideal state.[75]

However, in October 2014 MEXT rejected the group's application for permission to open the university. The reason given was that the aim, objectives, and curriculum of HSU, based almost exclusively on Ōkawa's publications, were not suitable for tertiary education.[76] The rejection was based on two articles: Article 83 of the School Education Act (*Gakkō kyōiku hō* 学校教育法) of 1947 and Article 19 of the University Establishment Standards of 1956 (*Daigaku secchi kijun* 大学設置基準). The former defines universities as "centers of arts and sciences" aimed at "teaching a wide range of knowledge and developing intellectual, moral and advanced abilities through deeply researching and studying specialized arts and science."[77] The latter refers to the requirement for a university to structure its teaching appropriately through faculties and departments, and to organize curricula systematically. Curricula should be designed in order to teach specialized arts and science to students,

73 See *Kōfuku no Kagaku* 2013.
74 Ōkawa 2013, pp. 19–20.
75 Ōkawa 2013, pp. 124–28.
76 The complete response from MEXT is available at http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/daigaku/toushin/attach/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2014/10/29/1357077_4_2.pdf (accessed 23 July 2016).
77 The text in Japanese is available at http://law.e-gov.go.jp/htmldata/S22/S22HO026.html (accessed 23 July 2016).

and also to foster in-depth general education and provide students with the ability to make comprehensive judgments.[78]

According to the MEXT report, there was a lack of evidence to prove the scientific rationality of the "spiritual messages" (*reigen* 霊言), transmitted through Ōkawa, which would form the basis of textbooks for the curriculum. The report defines learning (*gakumon* 学問) as knowledge and methods systematized and based on a set of theories that become both widely accepted and universal. Although the report clarifies that this is not a judgment of spiritual messages as religious practice, it clearly states that they cannot be recognized as scholarship, as they do not fulfill the above-mentioned criteria for the definition of learning. Only the leader, for example, can perform spiritual messages, so they are not universal.

Kōfuku no Kagaku's Response to MEXT

The group did not expect MEXT's rejection. Significant resources were invested in the construction of the new campus and the first graduates from Kōfuku no Kagaku Gakuen were expected to form the first intake of students for HSU in the spring of 2015. Furthermore, the group showed a very optimistic attitude, presenting the project during meetings and publishing several volumes on educational topics. During conversations I have had with members over the last few years, I had the impression that the opening of the university in 2015 was considered very likely to happen.[79] Kōfuku no Kagaku initially responded by lodging a formal objection (*igi mōshitate sho* 異議申立書) with MEXT on 7 November 2014, followed by a supplementary formal objection on 11 November 2014.[80] In these documents Kōfuku no Kagaku rejected accusations of having acted improperly by putting psychological pressure on MEXT representatives and claimed that the reasons for the rejection were a violation of academic freedom and freedom of religion as well as an act against the separation of religion and the state. Subsequently the group claimed that the Minister of Education, Shimomura Hakubun, may not have appreciated the spiritual messages that Ōkawa had received from his (that is, Shimomura's) "guardian spirit" (*shugorei* 守護霊), and which he published in 2014.[81] The objections were rejected, as a result of which Kōfuku no Kagaku will not be able to reapply to MEXT for official recognition until 2019.

Subsequently, in a series of publications following the event, the group also attempted to refute MEXT's definition of scholarship. For example, an article in the magazine *The Liberty* in January 2015 employs the "spirit" of Socrates to rebut the definition of learning, claiming that god and soul are not something that could be proven, but that they are nonetheless the "prerequisites for learning" (*gakumon no zentei* 学問の前提).[82] Furthermore, the article rejects the definition of learning as "knowledge and methods systematized and

78 See http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chousa/koutou/053/gijiroku/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2012/10/30/1325943_02_3_1.pdf (accessed 23 July 2016).

79 Ian Reader also mentioned to me that during a visit he conducted to Kōfuku no Kagaku's Tokyo headquarters in November 2013 the group representatives told him that they were expecting to get MEXT approval and that they were convinced that the plan would go ahead.

80 The full texts of these are available at http://university.happy-science.jp/files/2014/11/6tz5goqd.pdf and http://university.happy-science.jp/files/2014/11/7pq3qiyo.pdf (accessed 23 July 2016).

81 See Ōkawa 2014b.

82 *The Liberty* is a monthly magazine published by Kōfuku no Kagaku's publishing house (IRH Press) since 1995. The magazine, aimed at both a member and non-member audience, focuses on discussions of current political events and social issues. See http://the-liberty.com/article.php?item_id=8785 (accessed 18 March 2016).

based on a set of theories" in favor of a definition that sees religion as central to education, and learning as a mission "to reveal the truth of the world that God created."[83] As previously mentioned, from Kōfuku no Kagaku's point of view, moral education, which is a topic of interest to the current Abe administration, cannot exist without religious education. The group also rejected the accusations that the curriculum is solely based on spiritual messages and claimed that spiritual messages are not a technique exclusive to its leader, as other members perform them as well.

In various publications, speeches, and online articles Kōfuku no Kagaku reiterated the point that its teachings are based on spiritual messages and that MEXT did not discourage the application during initial consultations, even though the group declared from the beginning its intention to build a university based on religious teachings. At the same time, in articles and statements published by the organization, HSU is compared to universities established by other religious organizations, in particular Christian universities, which make explicit reference to their doctrine in their mission statements.

An issue of *The Liberty* magazine published in February 2015 devotes twenty pages to a discussion of the possibility of "a science of spiritual messages" (*reigengaku* 霊言学) as a response to the accusations that spiritual messages lack scientific basis. The discussion places Ōkawa's experience in the broader context of religious and spiritual traditions based on spiritual messages. This includes earlier Japanese new religions, such as Tenrikyō and Oomoto, whose leaders experienced spirit possessions, but also Islam, Christianity, European and American Spiritualism in the nineteenth century, and New Age channeling experiences in the 1970s. Furthermore, it presents *reigen* messages as a phenomenon that could be studied and scientifically evaluated, for example by analyzing their contents and mechanism, or by assessing the validity of the prophecies. These claims for the validity of spiritual messages are supported by interviews with several non-member experts.[84] Finally, at the end of the special issue a definition of science (*kagaku* 科学) as the "study of the structure of the world God created" (*kami no tsukutta sekai no shikumi no tankyū* 神の創った世界の仕組みの探究) is proposed, in contrast to science as a "study of replicable phenomena" (*saigensei no aru genshō no tankyū* 再現性のある現象の探究). This serves to assert the validity of the new discipline of *reigengaku* and to reinforce the importance of a religious understanding of scientific research.

Eventually Kōfuku no Kagaku decided to open Happy Science University (*Happī saiensu yunibāshiti* ハッピー・サイエンス・ユニバーシティ) as an unaccredited private religious school and in April 2015 admitted the first group of students. Organizations are not prohibited to set up their own institutions, but without MEXT recognition the awards they make are not officially accredited. This can have implications for the later career paths of graduates. It will be interesting to see what happens when the first group of students finish their study at Happy Science University in 2019.

Concluding Remarks

Kōfuku no Kagaku's attempts to challenge MEXT's definitions of learning and scholarship constitute an interesting case study of how a religious group negotiates the definition of

83 See http://the-liberty.com/article.php?item_id=8785 (accessed 18 March 2016).
84 *The Liberty* 2015, pp. 65–66.

a secular sphere, namely that of public education. As mentioned in the above analysis, other new religions successfully obtained permission to open a university in the postwar period. The most evident difference, as discussed above, is that Tenrikyō and Sōka Gakkai established institutions that mirrored secular universities while offering "added value." On the contrary, Kōfuku no Kagaku proposed a curriculum that openly challenged secular definitions of scholarship, learning, and science. Another important aspect to be considered is that in the immediate postwar period, new religions had an opportunity to enter the secular sphere (including politics), and, although criticized, they were also seen as an example of religion's ability to adapt to a modern society. In the case of Kōfuku no Kagaku, however, its attempt to set up a university occurred in the post-1995 era, when new religions have come to be seen more widely as a threat to secular institutions.

As a consequence, nowadays new religions are more commonly seen as incompatible with a specific definition of secular education and institutions. In such a context, the attempt by a registered new religious movement to gain ministry approval for a university grounded solely within that religion's own texts and its founder's revelations not only poses an explicit challenge to existing norms and views of what the academic and scientific bases of education should be; it may also reinforce public negative perceptions of and worries about new religions. By questioning the bases upon which university education is grounded, Kōfuku no Kagaku appeared to challenge the very foundations of the secular settlement that has held sway in Japan since 1945.[85] The exchange between Kōfuku no Kagaku and MEXT seems to confirm Asad's observation that having a public role in modern societies is accepted only for "those religions that are able *and* willing to enter the public sphere for the purpose of rational debate with opponents who are to be persuaded rather than coerced."[86]

At the same time, Kōfuku no Kagaku's focus on spiritual messages as a basis for its university education was in line with a prevailing ethos in new religions, in which political and educational activities remain an essential part of their activities. When groups are forced to separate their "religious" and "secular" activities, as was the case for Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō in 1970, they can lose dynamism. As McLaughlin[87] has observed, since the 1970s Sōka Gakkai has struggled to continue the growth momentum of earlier periods, and in recent years growth appears to have stagnated.

Therefore, as shown by its attempt to claim the validity of scientific examination of spiritual messages, Kōfuku no Kagaku will endeavor to claim its legitimacy in domains such as education and science and challenge secular definitions and criteria. New religions need to demonstrate their validity and relevance in secular domains to members, but at the same time aim to offer alternatives to the secular sphere. As previously discussed, other religiously affiliated universities, such as Tenri University or Sōka Daigaku, as well as Christian, Buddhist, and Shinto universities, have been able to offer secular education while including also religious aspects, such as classes on sectarian subjects or doctrinal studies departments. Kōfuku no Kagaku's failure to recognize the usefulness of this compromise (or negotiation of boundaries) is also due to its core belief that sees all these domains (spiritual, political,

85 It is also possible, although there is no evidence to support this, that the concern about the declining numbers of students in Japan may have been a factor in the MEXT's reluctance to grant recognition to a new university.

86 Asad 1999, p. 180.

87 As McLaughlin 2009; 2012b.

and so on) as interconnected, a vision in contrast with the idea of restricting the role of religion and separating it from the public sphere. Kōfuku no Kagaku offers, from this point of view, an interesting example of an uncompromising attitude of a religious group that refuses to confine itself to the private realm (or to keep religion "out of the classroom" as other confessional universities did in prewar Japan). In doing so it openly proposes an anti-secular utopian vision involving politics, religion, and economics, a vision that conflicts with the prevailing ethos of post-1995 Japan.

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