# Japanese New Religions An Overview and Selected Examples

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#### Overview of the lecture

- General introduction into the history of Japanese religions and the traditional religions of Japan
- The "New Religions" (shinshūkyō 新宗教) Periodization and general questions
- Selected examples of the "older period" (until 1970ties): Tenrikyō 天理教 Sōka Gakkai 創価学会
- Recent developments: General characteristics of the "new new religions" (shin-shinshūkyō 新新宗教)
- Selected examples: Kōfuku no kagaku 幸福の科学 Aum Shinrikyō 幸福の科学

## "New"- "Old"?

- "New Religions" (shinshūkyō 新宗教) of Japan
- Definition of "new religion", "new religious movements", "Neureligion"
- · Importance in Japanese society
- The "new new religions" (shin-shinshūkyō 新宗教)

## Religion in Japan: A Tapestry of Traditions

 "Established religions " (kisei shūkyō 既成宗教) or "traditional religions" (dentō shūkyō 伝統宗教), mainly:

Shintō

Buddhism

Taoism

Confucianism

(Christianity)



#### Shintō 神道

- Shintō 神道: "Way of the Gods" (kami 神)
- · Conglomeration of religious practices
- Formation as a reaction to influence of Buddhism and Taoism
- Material collected in Kojiki 古事記 and Nihon shoki 日本書紀

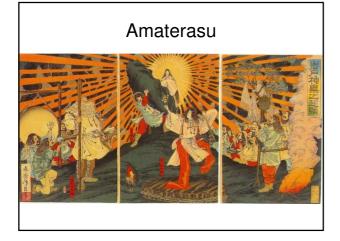
## Kojiki 古事記 ("Record of Ancient Matters")

• The names of the Deities that were born in the Plain of High Heaven when the Heaven and Earth began were the Deity Master-of-the-August-Centre-of-Heaven, next the High-August-Producing-Wondrous Deity, next the Divine-Producing-Wondrous-Deity. These three Deities were all Deities born alone, and hid their persons. The names of the Deities that were born next from a thing that sprouted up like unto a reed-shoot when the earth, young and like unto floating oil, drifted about medusalike, were the Pleasant-Reed-Shoot-Prince-Elder Deity, next the Heavenly-Eternally-Standing-Deity. These two Deities were likewise born alone, and hid their persons.

(Kojiki, transl. Chamberlain, 1919)



Izanami and Izanagi creating the earth



# Importance of Shintō

- Shintō as "statereligion" especially from 1868 ("Meijirevolution") -1945
- After WWII: state and religion became separated



## Shintō shrines

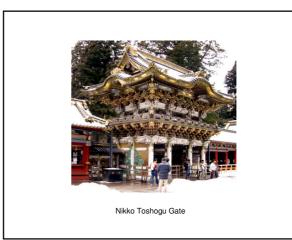
- Local god (ujigami)
- or
- important gods: Inari Hachiman

or

History of Japan



Fushimi Inari Taisha



## Shintō festivals (matsuri)



Gion Matsuri, Kyoto

## Buddhism (bukkyō 仏教)

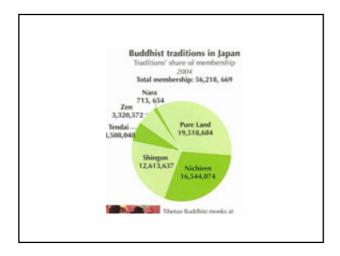
- Since early 6th century from Korea
- Prince Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 (574-622)
- First traditions: "Esoteric Buddhism": Tendai and Shingon

# Spread of Buddhism



## Various traditions

- Amida or "Pure Land"-Buddhism: namu Amida Butsu
- Nichiren-Buddhism: based on "Lotus Sutra": namu myōhō rengekyō
- Zen-Traditions: Eisai (1141-1215) and Dogen (1200-1253): direct achievement of enlightenment (satori)



## Buddhism and Japanese culture

- Bushidō 武 士道: "Way of the Warrior"
- Chadō 茶道: "Way of the Tea"
- Nō能
- Calligraphy
- Poetry

# Christianity

- Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier 1549 1597: Crucifixion of 26 martyrs 1614: Christianity is proscribed "Hidden Christians": Kakure Kirishitan
- 2) 1859/1873: new missionary activities, mainly in the North (Hokkaidō)
- 3) Post-WWII-Period: only minor gains until today

But: Important as expression of Western culture

#### Taoism and Confucianism

- Confucianism: ethical and political philosophy, important especially 6th-9th century and in the Edo-period (1600-1868)
- Taoism: important on different layers, mainly in popular culture until today

### New Religions?

- Continuity of new religions with traditional traditions
- General tendency to form new traditions
- Formation of sects/new approaches within the traditional religious cooperations
- "New Religions" are not a totally new period within the history of Japanese religions

# Periodization (according to Takagi Hirō)

- 1. 19th/early 20th century: "Meiji-revolution"
- 2. Taishō (1912-1926) and early Shōwa-era
- 3. After 1945: Postwar period
- 4. from the 70ties onwards: *shin-shinshūkyō* 新新宗教
- 5. After 1995

#### 1st Period

 1) 19th century: End of isolation in Edōperiod (1600-) in 1868: "Meiji"-revolution:

Tenrikyō 天理教 1838 Kurozumikyō 黒住教 1846 Konkōkyō 金光教 1859 Ōmoto 大本 1892

#### Characteristics

- Mainly Shintō background
- Some groups organized as "Sect-Shintō" kyōha shintō 教派神道 (not: State Shintō, kokka Shintō 国家神道)
- Origin in rural society
- Some groups have women as founders: said to be "speakers" of a highest god

## 2nd period

Taishō (1912-1926) and early Shōwa (1926-1989)-era:

- · Nationalism and Militarism
- Urbanization and beginning of industrialization
- · Origin in towns
- More Buddhist-based groups
- Persecutions

## Examples

Reiyūkai 霊友会 1925 Sekai Kyūseikyō 世界救世教 1928 Seichō no le 成長の家 1929 Sōka Gakkai 創価学会 1930

## 3rd period

#### After WWII 1945:

- · Seperation of state and religion
- "Freedom of believe": *shinkyō no jiyū* 信教の自由
- Shūkyō hōjin hō 宗教法人法 (Law on religious corporations)

## Examples

- P(erfect) L(iberty) Kyōdan (former Hito no michi Kyōkai人の道教会 1924))
- Mahikari 1963

## 4th period

- Since 1970ties: the "new new religions" shin-shinshūkyō 新新宗教
- · Further diversification
- · New "spiritual" trend
- Importance of Anglo-American "New Age"/Western Esotericism
- Use of modern mass-media

## Examples

- G(od) L(ight) A(ssociation) 1968
- Agonshū 1978
- Aum Shinrikyō 1984
- Kōfuku no kagaku 1986
- Worldmate

# 5th period (added to the periodization of Tagaki Hirō)

After Sarin-gas attack in Tokyo subway 1995 by members of Aum Shinrikyō

- · Changes in the religious corporation law
- More restrictive and cautious look on younger developments
- Membership figures of the shin-shinshūkyō 新新宗教 are stagnating since 2000 (the latest)

The future is open to new developments: "Qué será, será ..."