

The New Religions of Japan: A General Introduction and Selected Examples

One example of a typical statement on Japanese “new religions” in an important academic study on the history of Japanese religions:

Joseph M. KITAGAWA, *Religion in Japanese History*, 1966, 333:

„These new religions present nothing new, as far as their religious contents are concerned. Many of them derived their doctrines from Shinto, Confucianism, Buddhism, or Christianity. Their teachings are eclectic and not well systematized, but their simple, direct, and practical beliefs and practices appeal to the masses who do not feel at home with the complex doctrines of established religions. It is important to note, however, that they make full use of group psychology by offering both informal small groups meetings and elaborate mass assemblies. Most of them are highly centralized in their organizational structure, utilizing cell group systems as well as incentive plans. A few of them have semimillennaristic disciplines. All of them use modern mass media of communication and have efficient methods of tithing or its equivalent. What gives each of these new religions its distinctive character is the personality of the founder or organizer. Many of these boast unusual spiritual powers in divination, sorcery, incantation, fortunetelling, and healing, which betray the shamanistic roots of their religious orientations. They also have the capacity to attract and maintain rapport with a large number of followers. For the most part, these new religions draw their adherents from the lower middle class, especially middle-aged and older women, although a few of them claim to have some followers among the upper middle class and young people as well.”