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The Corporate Culture of a Globalized Japanese New Religion

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2009-04-28 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Smith, Wendy A. メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.15021/00002763

The Corporate Culture of a Globalized Japanese New Religion

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INTRODUCTION

Japanese religions, like Japanese corporations, have shown rapid expansion overseas since the war, and especially in the last three decades. With millions of followers in all parts of the world, they face the same organizational problems as large multinational corporations in relation to staffing at all administrative levels, global communications, adaptation to diverse local conditions and recruitment of local members. Like corporations too, in view of the media's domination of society, they face the challenge of image creation in marketing their product. They must also attract and retain followers in the face of media attacks¹⁾, and regulate their members' behaviour towards organizationally prescribed styles of thought, speech, body movements and general lifestyle, sometimes against the tide of media-inspired modern social behavioural norms. They too have to cope with market competition and increasingly, as they expand, with cases of dissent and schism or instances of community opposition to their buildings and doctrines.

In order to handle this, they evolve organizationally specific cultures, based on spiritual principles, which nevertheless function in the same way as corporate cultures in large multinationals, that is, to recruit and motivate members by establishing distinct and compelling patterns of thought and behaviour in the corporate context. Other elements of these spiritual corporate cultures, such as concern for the environment, education or health, promote a philanthropic image which enhances their community image.

In the context of religious organizations, the classic elements of corporate culture - stories of the founder, daily rituals, slogans, seasonal events and pilgrimages - are even more easy to establish because they have attributes of the spiritual realm and can be claimed to relate to a system of universal principles which cannot be questioned in the context of everyday logic. The difference is that these spiritual corporate cultures have as their aim not a financial profit motive, but one which seeks to maximize human happiness by accessing the spiritual realm.

This paper discusses the spiritual organizational style and organizational culture of Sūkyō Mahikari, from an analysis of its sacred places, global

organizational structure, daily and monthly rituals, and speech, behaviour and thought patterns of its members. The paper is based on field research in its centres in Japan, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. The analysis is informed by my previous study of cultural and organizational styles within a Japanese multinational in Malaysia [SMITH 1994, 1996], and by my comparative research in other Japanese New Religions, Tenrikyo, Omoto and Sekai Kyūseikyō.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MAHIKARI

Mahikari, often classified as one of Japan's "New New Religions," was established in Japan in the postwar era²⁾ by Okada Kotama³⁾ (1901-1974), respectfully called *Sukuinushisama* (Divine Savior), who received revelations from God in 1959, commanding him thus: "The time of heaven has come. Rise. Thy name shall be Kotama. Exercise the art of purification. The world shall encounter severe times." [OKADA 1982: 24]

After his death in 1974, the organization encountered the normal problems associated with succession, and it split into two groups. Sūkyō Mahikari, the group I am studying, is led by his adopted daughter Okada Keiju, respectfully called *Oshienushisama* (Great Teacher) and has its headquarters in Takayama. *Sukuinushisama*'s trusted friend, Sekiguchi Sakae (who died in 1995) assumed leadership of the other group Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan (SMBK), which has its headquarters in Ise and which kept the original name of the organization. It has also been the subject of academic study [MIYANAGA 1983]. It is said that of the two, Sūkyō Mahikari has the greater following overseas. All the centres I studied in Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines were Sūkyō Mahikari centres – at the time there were no SMBK centres in these countries although SMBK has a prominent presence in the U. S. Organization officials are reluctant to give membership figures. The Dictionary of New Religions – Personalities and Religious Bodies [INOUE et al. 1996] lists Sūkyō Mahikari as having 497,723 members and 522 ministers (p. 140). Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan is listed as having 99,954 members and 611 ministers (p. 163). Of the two groups, Sūkyō Mahikari has experienced higher rates of growth both in Japan and internationally. In the US, according to Melton and Jones [1994: 48], "Mahikari has been one of the most successful groups in reaching a non-Japanese constituency." Another source [HUMPHREYS and WARD 1995: 375] mentions a world membership of one million for Sūkyō Mahikari, of whom 300,000 are in Japan.

In Japanese, Mahikari means "True Light", a spiritual and purifying energy. It can be partially conceptualised in terms of the Japanese "*ki*" or the Chinese "*chi*" [MCVEIGH 1992a: 55-58]⁴⁾, but is different in the sense that it has a divine aspect. It is the Divine Light of the Creator, Su God. People become members of Mahikari, or *kamikumite* (those who go "hand-in-hand with God"), after attending the three day Primary *Kenshū* (training course) and receiving an *Omitama* (Divine Locket), which enables the person to act as a channel through which they project the True

Light from Su God. The *Omitama* is worn on the body of the *kamikumite* and is treated with great respect. It must not be allowed to become wet or touch the ground. That is why children do not become *kamikumite* until around the age of 10, when they are deemed to be able to take proper care of the *Omitama*. This process has been likened to an initiation [HURBON 1991: 224].⁵⁾

Members then have the ability to transmit the True Light following a procedure (see DAVIS 1980: 18-22) of praying to the Creator God, which involves bowing to the *Goshintai* (sacred scroll containing the *Chon*, symbol of Su God) and then to their partners as an act of politeness. Then with their backs to the *Goshintai*, the prayer of purification, *Amatsu Norigoto*, is recited and True Light is transmitted to the forehead of the other person through the raised palm of one hand. Light may then be transmitted to the back of the head and other parts of the body, a complete session taking about fifty minutes.⁶⁾ The practice of giving True Light and the attendance at group ceremonies, which intensify the power of the Light from Su God, are the fundamental activities of Mahikari members.

Once members are established in the Mahikari daily routines of visiting the centre and giving and receiving Light, they are encouraged to inaugurate an ancestral altar in their homes and make daily offerings of food to the ancestors in the male line, following the male surname principle of Japanese culture. Senior members are encouraged to establish a *Goshintai*, scroll with the Divine Name of God, in a Divine Altar, in their homes. Thus enabling them to give light even more effectively using their homes as a mini-centre.

Mahikari is open to people of all religions and viewpoints and does not attempt to convert people from their existing religious beliefs. Rather it intensifies their understanding of the major spiritual teachings of their religion, which are common to all religions. For instance, members explained to me that a Catholic priest would become a better Catholic priest by practising Mahikari [see also CORNILLE 1994:99]. The non-coercive nature of the organization is demonstrated by the fact that there is a significant dropout rate⁷⁾ of those who have received the Primary *Kenshū*, a fact freely mentioned by senior members. Mahikari beliefs also reflect this openness by incorporating elements of the “Five Major Religions:” Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam and Christianity.⁸⁾ Symbols from these and other major religions can be seen in the architectural design of the Main World Shrine (*Suza* or *Sekai Sō Honzan*) and the Mahikari Divine Emblem, which incorporates the circle, the cross, the six-pointed star and the sixteen petalled crest, symbolic of the Japanese Imperial family who are regarded as the representatives of the Shintō gods on earth.⁹⁾

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES AND RITUAL PRACTICES

The organization is distinguished by the practice of radiating True Light from the palm of the hand. This can be performed by any member of the organization (*kamikumite*) who has undergone the three-day Primary *Kenshū* and received the

Omitama (divine amulet). The purpose of giving this True Light is to purify the mind of the receiver and the attaching spirits who may be causing him or her suffering. Believers are encouraged to change their innermost attitudes (*sonen*), repenting deeply their wrong actions and giving gratitude to Su God. The giving and receiving of True Light helps this process of purifying the *sonen*. Thus the main activity of believers is giving light to as many people as possible every day, to save them. People come to the *dōjō* (practice hall) to do this, but can also do it at home or anywhere at all (especially in emergency situations), so long as they are wearing the *Omitama*. Followers are also advised to attend as many ceremonies as possible as the power of the Light is greater at these times. As a result of receiving the Light, many illnesses are healed and unfortunate circumstances in relationships or business are solved. Healing however is not the main purpose of the Light, which is to purify. Healing is just a by-product of this process. However the organization has an extensive body of teachings about health, and explains that adverse physical states can also be caused by the accumulation of toxins in the body, largely medicines taken over the years for chronic conditions, etc. There are accounts of spectacular cleansings where people receive the Light and then pass waste from their bodies which smells of the medicines they took years ago.

There is a dominant theme of cleanliness and purification in the Mahikari world view. *Dojo* are kept very clean and the environment is simple. Shoes are removed and personal belongings are left in cupboards at the side. The focus of the *dōjō* is the *Goshintai*, a scroll on which is written the name of God, *Mahikari Omikami*. Characteristic behaviour on visiting a *dōjō* includes washing hands after removing shoes, signing in one's name, time of arrival and *dōjō* affiliation at a register at the front counter, making an offering with prayers involving claps and bows in front of the *Goshintai*, greeting the whole room with a formal Japanese-style greeting (*aisatsu*) (such as "Good morning everyone") then giving and receiving Light (a process which takes up to 50 minutes for each person), performing leaving prayers and greeting the whole *dōjō* at the back of the room with words of thanks and farewell, signing out one's time of departure and thus leaving.

Mahikari claims to be beyond religion - a supra-religious (*sū-kyō*) body. According to the teachings, there are no "religions" in the spirit realm. Religions, and the culture-based social boundaries that they give rise to, are the creations of human beings, not of Su God, who is the supreme deity and who transcends, or embodies simultaneously, all religiously specific deities. Thus Mahikari would not wish to be defined as a specifically "Japanese" religion either, as its belief system embodies universal principles. Yet beliefs central to Mahikari, of purification and the importance of ancestors and spirits, are derived from traditions embedded in Shinto, Japanese folk religion and Buddhism as practised in Japan. This does not mean that these beliefs are exclusively Japanese, but they are critical aspects of the Japanese world view and everyday life practices.

Purification

At the physical level, the centres were kept very clean. Cleaning the *dōjō* is one form of Divine Service which members can perform. In Australia, as in Japan, no shoes are worn in the centre. In Japanese interiors, the taking off of shoes signifies the ritual purity of the domestic space or shrine, as opposed to the impurity of the outside world. Thus there are special slippers to be worn only in the toilet in Japanese houses, as in the *dōjō*. In larger *dōjō* in both Japan and Australia, there is an attractive washing area near the entrance with taps which sprayed vertical jets of water onto a bed of stones, so that members can wash their hands after handling their shoes. All centres have taps for this purpose, however simple. This purification by water at the entrance to the holy area is reminiscent of the purification of the mouth and hands before one enters a Shinto shrine.

Cleaning implements within the *dōjō* are colour-coded: red for wiping upper level surfaces and blue for wiping lower areas. At the Canberra *dōjō*, I observed the cleaning of the *Goshintai* being carried out by the centre chief herself, who wore a white head covering, face mask and white tunic while doing so with specially designated equipment. In bathrooms in homes and Mahikari centres there are separate sets of soap and towels for use before handling the *Omitama*. The *Omitama* itself must be handled according to strict conditions of ritual purity - it is wrapped in layers of plastic and cloth and worn in a special pocket in the upper clothing. It must never be allowed to become wet or touch the ground, or its purity and hence its power, will be nullified.¹⁰⁾

On the spiritual level, the transmission of True Light to the forehead purifies the soul of the recipient and helps uplift him or her spiritually. Members also purify offerings of money before placing them in the offering box in front of the *Goshintai*.¹¹⁾ At the end of each morning Opening Ceremony and before the evening Closing Ceremony, conducted daily in each *dōjō*, members rotate slowly counter-clockwise with raised hands, reciting the prayer of purification, *Amatsu Norigoto*, in order to purify the *dōjō* and its surroundings.

Ancestors

In the Japanese Buddhist tradition, ancestors are remembered through the placing of a tablet (*ihai*) containing their posthumous name (*kaimyō*) in the family Buddhist altar (*butsudan*). A photo of the most recently deceased ancestor is placed above the altar. Offerings of food, candles, incense and water are made daily and gifts given to family members are often placed in front of the altar for a day or two. Only those with the same surname are enshrined in the altar - similarly there is a common grave for the ashes of these members.

Mahikari members are encouraged to inaugurate an ancestral altar, separate from the traditional Buddhist one, and the Divine teachings give clear guidance on how to go about this correctly. This may be much smaller but has similar name tablets and a shelf which slides out to receive daily offerings of food from the family meal in miniature vessels. Miniature baby bottles are filled with milk as an

offering to family members who died in infancy. Cigarettes may also be offered.¹²⁾ Unlike the offerings to a Buddhist altar, it is important that the food is offered in an edible form, for instance unpeeled fruit would be useless as an offering as the ancestors' spirits would not be able to consume it.

Most Australian Mahikari members who had received Intermediate training and above had inaugurated an ancestral altar in their homes in a special ceremony conducted by the Centre chief. They had come to understand the importance of making offerings to the ancestors within the Mahikari world-view, as a way of preserving harmony in their daily lives. This was also true for members of all ethnic groups, apart from Chinese and Japanese, who, before joining Mahikari, had no culturally based beliefs or individual concerns regarding their relationship to their ancestors.

Spirits

While belief in spirits is an integral part of the Mahikari world view, many of those I interviewed emphasized that we should not become too interested in spirits. Spirits do not always tell the truth and they can be very manipulative. That is why only regional headquarters directors, (*buchō*), centre chiefs and *dōshi* are qualified and allowed to conduct spirit investigations, by questioning the spirits who manifest during *okiyome*. Spirits manifest to warn us that perhaps we are neglecting the needs of the ancestors, or they may be resentful due to suffering caused in the past.

Thus the central rituals and beliefs of Mahikari, including the giving of True Light, give concrete expression to various themes which are typical of Japanese culture: a deep concern with purification [KITAGAWA 1987: 261] and the distinction between pure and impure states of being; the reverence for ancestors demonstrated through ritual practices; and the influence of the spirit world on the living [PLUTSCHOW 1983]

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The organization is based at Takayama in Gifu-ken. The administrative headquarters is located in a multi-storied modern building just below the *Suza*, or Main World Shrine. The spiritual significance of this headquarters is signified by the existence of a *dōjō* on the top floor, even though the Main World Shrine is just across the road. Morning and evening ceremonies are conducted in this closer *dōjō*, staff members give each other Light during the day and important deliberations are preceded by prayers in the *dōjō*. Hence its existence clearly indicates the priority given to the spiritual in the organizational style of Mahikari. Similarly, the hospital building of the Yoko clinic, which has been established in Takayama by Mahikari, has a *dōjō* at the top of the building.

In the administrative headquarters is an International Department, staffed with senior Japanese *kamikumite* who can speak English and other foreign languages. Many senior administrators in the organization are *dōshi*, or ministers, that is, they

have undergone the three-year *dōshi* training course. *Dōshi* can be posted anywhere in the world as part of their training and also as part of their religious service. Non-Japanese who come to Japan for the *dōshi* training course are usually posted in a *dōjō* in Japan for two years after the first year in the *dōshi* training centre near Takayama. There were always several foreign *dōshi* assigned to the International Department in Takayama. The organization is divided into *Shidobu* (regional headquarters). There are 15 *Shidobu*: 9 in Japan, (with a total of 168 full *dōjō*) and 6 overseas (Europe (with 12 *dōjō*), Africa (2), North America (4), Latin America (9), Australia/Oceania (3) and Asia (1), making a total of 31 overseas *dōjō*). It must be mentioned that numerous smaller units, *okiyome-sho* (purification place), *renraku-sho* (contact place) and groups gathering in members' homes with *Goshintai*, exist outside these figures.

The representation of these organizational units finds expression as a central part of the Grand Autumn and Spring Ceremonies in *Suza*. In the formal procession at the beginning and end of each ceremony, the *Shidobu* chiefs march into the hall behind their regional flags, followed by the *dōjō* chiefs, or their representatives, in their region. All participants are very formally dressed and wear white gloves. All the *Shidobu* chiefs are Japanese, with the exception of the Australia/Oceania chief, Dr Tebecis, who has a Japanese wife, (a former *dōshi*), and all are male. There are a number of female *dōjō* chiefs however.

As movements expand they face the problem of structuring the organization to cope with growing numbers, geographical distance and the loss of the personal link with the founder. The problem of succession has already been experienced within the Mahikari movement [INOUE et al. 1996: 164; CORNILLE 1991: 268]. Mahikari has made the transition to a global organization, using the clearly defined hierarchy of authority set up in Japan to structure the organization in its overseas centres as well. It binds the whole structure together with a sophisticated communication system of reporting from the lower to the higher units in the organization. This is called "reporting upstream". For instance, group carers, who may have within their group up to fifty ordinary members, are asked to write a report on each member and submit this to the *kambu*, (centre officials), each month. Any significant aspects of these reports would be reported by the *kambu* to the *Shidōbu*, and by *Shidōbu* to central headquarters. Personal details of members' lives, financial contributions, all are systematically recorded and reported, making the administrative demands on *kambu* and group carers quite substantial.

The organization of Mahikari focuses primarily around the institution of the *dōjō*, or practice place, usually translated as "centre". This is a physical location which has connotations of the spiritual in both Mahikari terminology and in the Japanese martial arts, which use the same term for their practice halls.

Mahikari centres are graded according to their size and importance, from *dai-*, *chū-*, *shō-* and *jun-* *dōjō* (large, medium, small and associate centres), followed by *okiyome-sho* and *renraku-sho*. Grades are allocated not just on the basis of the number of members in a centre, but on their level of commitment, that is, there

must be a significant proportion of members who have taken the Intermediate *Kenshu* training course, which can be taken locally, and the Advanced *Kenshu* training course, which can only be taken at *Suza*, for a centre to be accorded the status of *chū-* or *daidōjō*.

Furthermore, to take these higher *Kenshū*, one must have a record of guiding a certain number of new members to Sūkyō Mahikari – five for Intermediate *Kenshū* and twenty for Advanced *Kenshu*. This graded system of centres, and the criteria for their status, is both in Japan and overseas. However there are very few *daidōjō* overseas. The largest centre, apart from the Main World Shrine and the Mahikari headquarters in Takayama, is the Kyoto *Daidōjō*, with a main hall of 340 *tatami* mats, which accommodated over 1000 people at its New Year ceremony in 1996. Canberra, the largest centre in Australia, has the status of *chūdōjō*, and the Melbourne centre is an *okiyome-sho*.

A feature of all these centres is the provision of a family room where parents can be with small children while receiving the True Light or listening to lectures through the installed sound or video system. The homes of senior members who have inaugurated the *Goshintai* and who wish to make them available for this purpose, also serve as *okiyome homes*, which are open for several nights a week for people to drop in and receive the True Light, especially if they live far away from the centre. In 1996 there were four *okiyome homes* in Canberra and six in Melbourne.

Overseeing the *dojo* are the Regional Headquarters (*Shidobu*), one for each prefecture in Japan, and one each for Europe/Africa, North America, Latin America, Asia and Australia/Oceania. The latter includes South Africa, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, New Caledonia and Fiji. It is headed by the *bucho*,¹³⁾ Dr Tebecis, on behalf of *Oshienushisama* and his role includes both spiritual and managerial aspects. He visits centres in all the countries regularly, conducting the Primary *Kenshū* and bestowing the *Omitama* on new members. He also administers the region, overseeing and recommending staff transfers and promotions in rank, and conducts the *Shidōbu* monthly ceremony as the spiritual representative of *Oshienushisama*. Above the Regional Headquarters in the structure of the organization is the Sūkyō Mahikari Headquarters located in Takayama in the building described above opposite the Main World Shrine. Its role is to transmit spiritual guidance from *Oshienushisama* to the Regional Headquarters.

Roles within the movement are similarly ranked according to modern organizational principles¹⁴⁾ and are the same both in Japan and overseas. Below *Oshienushisama* herself are a few very senior members of Sūkyō Mahikari Headquarters, the *kanchō* in charge of *Suza* for instance. In general the main ranks are *dōshi* (minister) and *dōjōchō* (centre chiefs). Centre chiefs below *bucho* are spiritually in charge of the centre, are usually from the locality and rarely transferred. *Dōshi*¹⁵⁾ are the disciples of *Oshienushisama* who have undertaken a three-year training course. *Dōshi* are of all nationalities and may be transferred, often at intervals of about three years, across national and *Shidōbu* boundaries. For

instance, there were two successive South African *dōshi* posted to the Melbourne centre in the late 1990s, two Japanese *dōshi* serving in the Canberra Regional Headquarters and an Australian *dōshi* at the International Division in Takayama.

Within the *dōjō* there are different group leaders, coordinators and other personnel who coordinate such groups as the Parents' Group, Educators' Group, Older Youth Group, Primary Students' Group, Kindergarten Group and so on. There are also various leadership roles relating to the Youth Corps, Yoko agriculture and medicine. In these systems, spiritual elements and modern bureaucratic principles are combined. For instance, the appointment to a leadership role in one of these groups is officially made by *Oshienushisama* on the basis of the individual's spiritual qualities, yet the size of the group, its hierarchical structure and the communication and recording procedures mirror aspects of the large organizations found in modern secular society.

To some outsiders these give the impression of a military organization. A researcher of Mahikari in Western Europe noted that the wearing of uniforms, the marching practice and the emphasis on discipline in the Mahikari Youth Corps also impart a flavour of the military [CORNILLE 1991: 281]. This Corps is not compulsory for the younger members of Mahikari and makes up only a small proportion of Mahikari youth. It serves as a vital source of labour in organizing the large Mahikari ceremonies which take place regularly throughout the year. For instance, at the monthly Regional Headquarters ceremonies in Canberra, the Mahikari Youth prepare the venue and greet members and visitors as they arrive, making sure that they are welcomed and helped to their seats. They perform a role very similar to the female staff who greet customers at the entrance of department stores in Japan. They are always impeccably dressed in their green blazers and cream skirts or slacks and use a very positive, formal greeting style to those arriving, which mirrors the Japanese style, although it is expressed in the local language. In the major annual ceremonies at *Suza*, the Mahikari Youth line the stairways greeting *kamikumite* as they arrive from all over the world. They control the long queues of people entering the large hall and the hand out the souvenirs and other presents to participants as they arrive and leave. In the *Oharaisai*, the Grand Purification Ceremony conducted at a large complex of international exhibition buildings in Nagoya, the Mahikari Youth lined the road and saluted as *Oshienushisama* arrived in a large black Japanese limousine. In Singapore, for the monthly Regional Headquarters ceremony, they were responsible for organizing the orderly seating of a large number of people in the relatively small *dōjō*, asking them to move up into neat rows as they sat on the carpeted floor. Mahikari Youth also take major roles in ceremonies, carrying the flags for each Regional Headquarters and *dōjō* in the major ceremonies that take place at *Suza*. Prior to the ceremonies, they also march through the streets of Takayama in a parade of young Mahikari members, some of whom wear the Youth Corps uniform, some their national costumes and some, the outfits of cheerleaders at a football match. The Mahikari Youth are so disciplined and well presented that it is difficult not to think of them as

members of a military parade. The uniform also unifies young members of many nationalities and is thus a major feature of Mahikari's global identity.

There are other aspects of Mahikari's organizational style which give the impression of extreme discipline and almost military control. For instance, large *dōjō* in Japan have video camera monitoring systems installed, with a console located in the room of the *dōjō* chief for viewing what is going on in any of the halls. It was explained to me that these facilities are in place to make sure that visitors are not neglected. The requirement that those visiting the *dōjō* sign in and sign out with the time of their arrival and departure also imparts a strict organizational atmosphere.¹⁶⁾ This recording is overseen by receptionists in Japan, and is one of the first elements of the ritual of visiting a centre. In Australian centres, although the registers are placed near the entrance, they are much more informal in mood.¹⁷⁾ In Malaysia, the registration procedure was much stricter and the receptionist insisted that visitors fill out a form stating name, identity card number or passport number and religious affiliation. This is because the Malaysian government prohibits non-Muslim religious groups from conducting missionary activities amongst Muslims, who make up 60 percent of the Malaysian population. The organizational practice of registering one's arrival and departure is not unique to Mahikari but typical of practices within mainstream Japanese society. For instance academic staff of a Japanese tertiary research institute were required to register the time of their arrival and departure with a receptionist, and the building was subject to video surveillance. However, such features may seem inappropriate in a religious context to Australians or other overseas Mahikari members.

CORPORATE CULTURE

Recruitment of members

As the organisation is relatively new, it is still evolving organizational forms and these are fairly fluid. In the early days of expansion overseas, in the 1970s, any successful method was used. At first the movement spread through the individual presence of *kumite* who give Light to friends and associates, and a core group grew up by this method of personal networking. A senior member who founded many Mahikari centres in South America described to me how as a young man he took a ship to Brazil from Europe, with the idea of spreading Mahikari in the region. On the ship he encountered people with various problems and offered to give them Light. When they experienced dramatic improvements, a following developed and this increased when he disembarked at Sao Paulo. The passengers told their friends and relatives about the very positive experiences they had had after receiving the Light. The centres in South America grew up in this way.

A second feature of Mahikari is that the possibility for people to have the *Goshintai* in their homes increases the potential for informal expansion activities, based on the presence of senior members in the wider community. As more and more people experience the Light and the personal miracles which accompany it, a

demand arises for a local *Kenshū* initiation course. Until there are enough members to justify holding such a course locally (usually around twenty people as a minimum) prospective *kumite* must travel interstate or even internationally to receive *Kenshū*. Once local demand increases, a senior member, usually a *Shidōbu buchō*, will travel there especially to give the *Kenshū*. This process signifies the start of a new *okiyomesho* or *dōjō* in the area, but this requires a member sufficiently qualified to carry out the ceremonies in relation to the *Goshintai* to and look after it properly.

It was explained to me that Sūkyō Mahikari was so successful in Asia because of the presence of Dr Andris Tebecis, the Asia region *buchō* at the time. As one *kumite* explained to me, there was a degree of antipathy towards Japan and the Japanese in Southeast Asia after the wartime occupation of the countries of the region, so the fact that he was an Australian (albeit of Latvian ethnic origin) travelling to give them *Kenshū*, was a very positive factor in their acceptance of what was seen as a Japanese religion in the first instance. Also Dr Tebecis wrote a very influential book in English, *Mahikari - Thank God for the Answers at Last*, which was read by many people who found it in public libraries, in the homes of friends and in bookstores. This book gives an outline of the basic doctrine of Mahikari and has an extensive account of miracles experienced by people after receiving the Light.

A senior member (*shunin*) of the International Department explained to me that the style of organisation, with regional *Shidōbu*, is one reason for Mahikari's rapid expansion overseas. Local *buchō* are given the autonomy to allocate personnel to the roles of *kambu*, the lay administrative leaders, and to move around the *dōshi*, spiritual leaders, to the various *dōjō* in the region. As the *buchō* travel constantly between the *dōjō* in the region, they know the circumstances on the ground and can allocate appropriate personnel according to local needs. Dr Tebecis, who subsequently became the *buchō* for the Australia/Oceania region based in Canberra, travels constantly to meet his constituents and give *Kenshū* in all the capital cities in Australia, and to New Zealand, New Caledonia, New Guinea and South Africa. There have been three *dōshi* of South African origin in the various *dōjō* in Australia and *kambu*-in-training (*kambukōhosei*) come to live in the Canberra *Shidōbu* from all these countries. Thus the global movement of personnel is built into the structure of the organization. *Dōshi* especially can be expected to be posted to *dōjō* anywhere in the world, although it is usually within their region in the first instance, or to Japan. Thus they perform a very important function in unifying the organization globally. *Kambu*, who are the *dōjōchō* and other junior administrative officers (*junkambu*), generally have jobs and families in their home town and thus are not usually moved around. *Dōshi* live in the *dōjō* if they are single. They receive a stipend, they have few personal possessions and they live very frugally. They do not usually marry until in their late thirties and then it is often to another *dōshi*. Female *dōshi* must give up the role on marriage and become *junkambu*. Unlike other *kambu* who may have families and jobs in the area, married *dōshi* with

families are regularly asked to relocate to new *dōjō* far away. One *dōshi* will not usually be posted to a *dōjō* for longer than three years. This constant movement of personnel gives a very global feel to the organization. However the concentration of Japanese *dōshi* overseas is quite high, mirroring the high concentration of Japanese expatriate managers in Japanese firms overseas and the way this is used as an organizational control mechanism. [SIM 1977]

RECRUITMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

As the organization has expanded very rapidly and centres have been set up in all major cities in western countries and in most capital cities in the developing countries, they have had to face the typical problem of staffing the new administrative units with experienced personnel. The administration of a centre requires a very rounded and developed personality, a person who can simultaneously handle spiritual matters, such as the spiritual counselling of disturbed attaching spirits, personnel matters such as the relationships between the various office bearers, and financial matters, as the centres are usually rented and often have high rents as they are located in key places in busy shopping centres or on good public transport routes. *Kambu* must also have enough personal spiritual stature to counsel members on family problems and other social issues, as their advice is considered to be gospel to members. If the problem is too difficult for them, they are encouraged to report “upstream” to the *buchō* or ultimately to *Oshienushisama*, but of course the upstream administrators will have a parish of thousands and so a degree of delegation and discrimination is necessary.

The organization, in not discriminating between male and female, opens itself to the considerable administrative strengths and spiritual talents of its women members and thus benefits from this in terms of the utilization of human resources. There are some women of note in very prominent roles: the centre chief of the Kyoto *daidōjō* is a woman; the chief of Canberra, the biggest *dōjō* in Australia, is a woman; the head of the Yoko Clinic in Takayama is a female doctor. According to Mahikari teachings, which emphasize the harmonious combination of the fire and water principles (synonymous with male and female), women retain their positive female qualities while in leadership roles, although they may activate the fire aspect of their personalities to assume authority in certain situations. In this sense, Mahikari celebrates the principle of difference between the sexes and uses it in a very positive way.

However the need to create a cohort of competent spiritual administrators in a hurry has placed demands on the organization and one disenchanted member complained that the *kambu* in his *dōjō* were not very experienced in guiding the lower level members of the hierarchy, that is, the group carers, in their duties.

Motivation

Mahikari motivates its members to keep practising *mahikari no waza* by

conducting regular study groups after the initial *Kenshū* sessions and by the institution of the group carer system, where senior members act as mentors for a group of newer members, usually those who live geographically close to them. Group carers usually have a *Goshintai* in their homes and conduct monthly *Goshintai* appreciation ceremonies, to which their group members are invited. This is a brief ceremony, with the usual ritual prayers, preceded and followed by the participants giving and receiving Light. Tea and cakes are served after the ceremony. Participants will make donations in the same way as donations are made at the centre and these will be passed on to the centre by the group carer.

The monthly journals published in the Asia/Oceania region and the North America region in English, and in Japan in Japanese¹⁸⁾, also serve as a motivating force. These journals are attractively presented, inexpensive to subscribe to, and contain interesting accounts by members who have experienced miracles or other radical changes in their lives through the practice of *mahikari no waza*. The accounts include photos of the authors and are written in a very personal style, making it easy for the reader to identify with the writers and their lives and draw comparisons.

The ceremonies too contain elements which motivate members. A dramatic part of every major ceremony is the personal testimony read out by a chosen member, who is usually an ordinary member, not a *kambu*. The accounts are prepared in advance and the manuscript of the speech is vetted by the organisation. Although the text is read out in a formal way, these testimonies often contain heart-rending tales of personal sorrow and the triumph of the individual over adversity through receiving the Light. It is common for the person giving the testimony to shed tears, and for those in the audience to do so also. This has a cathartic as well as a bonding function. Public testimonies of this kind are found in many new religions (see ANDERSON 1988). At a more informal level, at the end of the morning and evening closing ceremonies at the centres, the *dōjō* chief will ask members present to share any miracle or experience that they have had recently. These can range from success in exams or getting a good parking spot in order to come to the centre, to major miracle cures in health.

Preservation of values

Mahikari has established a remarkably uniform “corporate culture” in its global organization, based on the common practice of rituals, common organization structures in local units, major pilgrimages which bring members together from all over the world, and most importantly, the common practice of *mahikari no waza* which has universally observable miraculous effects in people’s lives. Members maintain uniform standards of cleanliness in the *dōjō*, uniform standards of strictness in the ritual practices, and uniform levels of understanding of Mahikari teachings. I interviewed members in Australia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Japan, using basically the same questionnaire and I found that the answers I received to certain questions on doctrinal issues were very similar.

Individuals gave different perspectives on the issues, but I could not distinguish any national differences based on nationally specific cultures.

A key issue in discussing the spread of a New Religion overseas is that of hybridity – to what extent are changed made to accommodate overseas members' different cultural backgrounds. In the case of centuries' old religions, such as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism, we can see distinct regional differences in the way the religions have changes to attract and retain believers over the centuries. In the case of Japanese New Religions, the globalization process is still relatively recent, and very few regional changes are observable.

There have been no changes overseas in central issues like the ceremonies or doctrine. Even in terms of the material culture of the organization, global uniformity is maintained. When I visited *dōjō* in Singapore, Malaysia and many places in Australia, I was struck by the similarity in their design, layout and atmosphere - simple, clean and peaceful. Especially in places like Malaysia or the Philippines, where public spaces can be quite dirty, the cleanliness of the Mahikari *dōjō* was striking.

Moreover, the style of prayer, kneeling, bowing and clapping is the same everywhere. Members are coached in these forms by the *dōshi* before major ceremonies begin. Depending on the circumstances, the prayer may be made sitting in a chair or standing up, but these alternatives are available to Japanese in Japan too. For instance, in *Suza*, the prayers are made sitting in seats. When one visits the *Hikarushinden*, a shrine commemorating *Sukuinushisama* located in the mountains outside Takayama, members pray as a group standing up. At some study meetings or monthly ceremonies in the *dōjō* in Australia, the audience are seated on chairs and pray from a sitting position, but in the normal daily conduct of *dōjō* activities in any country, prayers are conducted on the floor. Similarly non-Japanese *kamikumite* adopt the ritual postures of approaching the *Goshintai* with three sideways steps and the upper body bent in a 30 degree bow during the ceremonies. This posture in particular, but the bowing in general, is very unusual body language for Australians.

All members take off their shoes in the *dōjō* and remember to make a brief bow when they pass in front of the *Goshintai* in the course of moving around the *dōjō*. They kneel in the formal Japanese *seiza* position to do the prayers and receive *okiyome*, although people with physical difficulties can sit in a chair or use a low stool to aid them in kneeling. Nevertheless many people who find kneeling very arduous still make an effort to follow these ritual forms as a sign of their devotion.

As one advances in spiritual knowledge and practice, one is recommended to inaugurate an ancestral altar at home and make daily offerings of food to one's ancestors in the male line. This is very alien to the worldview of Australians, yet most established members all had ancestral altars and were making offerings regularly. At the highest level members may have a *Goshintai* inaugurated in their homes, which requires a high degree of looking after, cleaning, not leaving

unattended for long periods, etc. Such activities have no precedent in mainstream Australian culture.

From the point of view of the Mahikari headquarters there should be no need to modify the doctrine to suit local cultural beliefs, although minor concessions to some forms of communication can be mentioned here. This view arises from the fact that in Mahikari teachings there is the assertion that all religions; languages, etc originate in Japan. If this is difficult for non-Japanese to accept at first, they are told that it is not necessary to accept everything initially - just receive *okiyome* regularly and the truth of these ideas will unfold. Many people take the Primary *Kensū* not being able to accept a sizeable proportion of the ideas expressed at the time. But that this is explained in the first instance and deemed to be acceptable overcomes their reservations in most cases. Their faith is strengthened by the occurrence of real miracles in their lives and the lives of those around them and the fact that testimonies of these occurrences is built into the ceremonies reinforces the sense they have of the importance of their own experiences.

In recent years, there was a slight area of adjustment in the language used. The main prayer, *Amatsu Norigoto*, has always been recited in Japanese and it has been an impressive feature in Mahikari's globalization. To see Australians and other nationalities who spoke no Japanese and had never been to Japan reciting this prayer in a loud voice in the crowded *dōjō* without hesitation, is a moving experience for an anthropologist. Members have also committed to memory the longer prayer in Japanese to *Izunomesama*, the deity who signifies the physical manifestation of God on earth. However some members in the Sydney *dōjō* feel uncomfortable with the Japaneseness of certain aspects of ritual behaviour, especially the practice of kneeling down to bow and greet the whole *dōjō* upon arrival. Similarly the *Amatsu Norigoto* has come to be referred to as the "Divine Prayer" in English rather than Japanese, and other key terms are being translated into English. In 1997 I was asked by the headquarters in Takayama for my advice on the translation of certain terms into English for use in English-speaking centres, to replace the Japanese terms which had been used until now. A meeting of all *buchō* was convened in Takayama at the time of one of the Grand Ceremonies to discuss this list. Secondly the Japanese style of referring to key individuals in the organization by their formal role names, such as *dōjōchō*, *buchō* etc, or even "chief", is now being substituted with the system of using the individual's personal name. These are relatively minor concessions to the social relational styles and communication styles of the local members. The rituals which involve bowing and clapping, the reciting of the *Amatsu Norigoto* in Japanese and the reverence shown to the *Goshintai* can never be changed.

By contrast, Tenrikyo, which has had substantial overseas activity for decades and which maintains a translation and publication section which covers sixteen foreign languages is facing the problem of trying to translate its main ritual prayer into the local languages. As this prayer is sung to a specific tune, accompanied by graceful hand movements, the problem of fitting local words into the existing

rhythm is considerable. Yet Tenrikyō officials in the missionary department feel that this will help in spreading the popularity of Tenrikyō overseas. Tenrikyō has been committed to global missionary activities from the beginning of the twentieth century and in fact established the first ethnological museum in Japan, a forerunner of Minpaku, the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, and a university with an extensive foreign languages department, for just that purpose. Ironically, Mahikari could be said to have a much more dynamically expanding overseas following than Tenrikyō today, despite Mahikari's insistence on the strict maintenance of ritual forms and Japanese cultural practices overseas.

Handling turnover in membership

Deciding to take *Kenshū* and receive the *Omitama* constitutes a considerable commitment for the individual as it involves changing one's lifestyle in terms of looking after the *Omitama* and giving Light regularly to others, also visiting the centre regularly and making financial contributions. At this stage, members will also consider inaugurating an ancestral altar, which involves purchasing the stylized altar and ancestral tablets and making daily offerings of food using very small utensils. The enthusiasm for these lifestyle changes is generated by the personal miracles and cleansings that have been experienced and by the fact that the giving of Light allows one to help other people and perhaps observe the same miracles occurring in their lives. Yet disenchantment can set in, especially if the cleansings involving health, finances or relationships, become quite challenging. While these should be welcomed, they can still be rather difficult for the individual to accept. Members may become complacent about giving and receiving Light and feel lazy. Dropouts do occur and the *kambu* use the term "hibernating" to refer to someone who has not come to the centre for some time, but who is not necessarily totally disenchanted with Mahikari. Gentle overtures are made to these members by their group carer, but there is no attempt to coerce them back into the fold.

Some members, especially a few who had high status within the organization, have left and have become very hostile to the organization. They placed accounts of their experiences and feelings on the internet, accompanied by links which refer to Japan's wartime atrocities and other emotionally powerful topics. This has been a significant blow to the organization, which has lost members who read and sympathized with the Internet material. It has had more impact in those countries where the Internet is part of people's daily lives. Thus Singapore has been more affected than the Philippines, where most members cannot afford a computer at home. In the face of this Internet warfare, *Oshienushisama* has steadfastly refused to reply by putting a Mahikari home page on the internet. Thus negative accounts of Mahikari dominate, if one searches using this term. The use of hypertext links has been a particularly devastating weapon for those behind this anti-Mahikari movement, as they have an immediate emotional impact, and are of uncertain validity – for instance the internet link found on the anti-Mahikari home page, between the founder's past as a Japanese military officer and the military activities

of the Japanese in the Nanking incident, contains the implication that the founder participated in the incident, whereas this is not actually established in the material presented.

It is a sign of Mahikari's maturity as an organization and size in terms of membership and financial strength that these anti-organizational movements emerge. In any organization of this size, disenchanted members, or members seeking schism to fulfil their own political ambitions, often arise, and the literature on many Japanese New Religions shows evidence of similar phenomena. The accusations of financial and sexual misdemeanors of senior members of these organizations are typical of such attacks also. However in the case of Mahikari, the medium used, that of the internet, make these attacks all the more effective. Other New Religions have used the internet to further their cause very effectively. Mahikari is withholding its participation in the internet based on spiritual considerations, but this is an unfinished experiment and the outcome is unsure.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The offering of money to Su God plays a very important role in the rituals which take place in the *dōjō*. It is not mandatory to do so, but most members will enter the *dōjō* and immediately go to the counter where the offering envelopes are kept and write out a slip bearing their name, the amount and the purpose of the offering, either as a contribution for receiving *okiyome* or as a way of establishing a link with God, *otamagushi*. This is then purified with *mahikari no waza*, raising the hand to the envelope and reciting the *Amatsu Norigoto*, then the envelope is reverently placed in the donation box in front of the *Goshintai* accompanied by prayers and claps and bows. The envelope must be handled very precisely, with the front facing forward and dropped into the box with the writing not upside down. In Japan I was taught that even the banknote inside must be oriented with the front facing forward. As I am not a *kumite*, I was told to have my offering purified by a member before placing it in the box.

Any small amount is welcome, and centres provide both paper envelopes for note offerings and small plastic bags for coin offerings, located on a bench specially designated for writing the offerings. The amount donated by each person is recorded by *kambu* however, and someone once remarked that those who donate a lot in proportion to their means have more chance of becoming *kambu*. Therefore money is one of the major signifiers of commitment to the organization and to Su God, as is the frequency of giving Light. The organization has been criticised for extracting large amounts of money from overseas members and using it to build opulent places of worship in Japan, such as *Suza* and *Hikarushinden*. However most of those who donate money would be most happy for it to be used for this purpose and would themselves visit these places as often as they could - at least once a year for one of the Grand Festivals, if that were within their means.

FACTORS PROMOTING GLOBALISATION

Mahikari no waza

The main source of Mahikari's appeal is the experience of miracles that follow the experience of receiving the True Light. People told of miraculous improvements in their physical ailments. Also their relationship problems often improved, or their financial or business situation. Physical health and relationship problems are the main areas of suffering in any society, and it is even true in affluent societies like Australia or Japan, where in comparison with countries like the Philippines, people have every physical luxury. The direct personal experience of these unusual events, which in modern scientific terms could only be described as miracles, was the main reason for most people to join Mahikari and it was such a powerful experience that it overcame any hesitation they may have about the cultural strangeness of some Mahikari rituals and organizational features.

Explanation for the cause of suffering

The teachings of Mahikari were a compelling source of explanation about the reason for misfortune and they also offer a practical way to overcome it. The experience of suffering and the desire to understand and overcome it is an aspect of human life which transcends cultures. Newcomers first needed to accept the doctrine of rebirth, then it was possible for them to understand the central teaching that 80% of human suffering is due to the presence of attaching spirits who may be afflicting us because of things we have done in past lives, or because of things that our ancestors have done in their lives. Most interviewees said that they had had no explanation for misfortune until encountering Mahikari and this belief system satisfied them. Moreover, Mahikari then offered a concrete method to overcome suffering, by giving and receiving Light, and there were many instances where this actually worked, in their own experience and in the experiences of people around them.

Emphasis on the family

All *dōjō* have a place for children and this is especially important for the parents of young children who would normally disturb the atmosphere of a church. Especially mothers of young children are usually not able to engage in any form of spiritual activity, even at home, because of the constant demands of childcare. Mahikari simultaneously provides a place where they can feel welcome and can obtain support from other members in giving and receiving Light while having the children present. For this purpose there is a special family room in every *dōjō* with a television monitor showing what is happening in the main room. Parents with small children can base themselves there and give and receive Light in informal surroundings. Even at the big *Oharaisai* ceremony held in Nagoya each December there is a special hall designated for *kumite* with young families and it is always full.

Welcoming procedures for non-Japanese *kumite*

The International Department in Takayama makes many efforts to make foreign *kumite* feel welcome in the organization. Visiting *Suza*, the Main World Shrine, is a peak experience for any *kumite* and foreign *kumite* will save hard to make the trip – usually participating in a package tour organized by the *dōjō* at the time of one of the major annual festivals, the *Taisai* in Takayama in autumn or spring or the *Oharaisai* in early December in Nagoya. At the *Oharaisai*, held in several halls simultaneously in the Nagoya international exhibition complex, and which is attended by huge numbers of people, there are special seating arrangements for foreign *kumite*, chairs at the front in the main hall where *Oshienushisama* appears in person, and radio headphones supplying simultaneous translation in Chinese, English and several other European languages.¹⁹⁾ The Japanese participants sit on the floor of the halls on *tatami* mats with their shoes kept in plastic bags.

Suza itself reflects the global feel of Mahikari and is designed as an international venue. Despite the fact that all activities in *dōjō* overseas are conducted on the floor, on *tatami* mats or carpet, *Suza* has very comfortable theatre style seats and carpet and shoes are not taken off. The style of ceremonies there is very international also, with a pipe organ being played for the ceremonial entrance music, and cultural performances by *kumite* from all over the world incorporated into the programme.

On visiting *Suza*, foreign *kumite* are made to feel special. They are seated at the front of the hall, just behind the special guests, and they receive an individual present from *Oshienushisama* at the end of the ceremony. I received a very nice cake in department store wrapping after the Grand Autumn *Taisai*.

The architecture of *Suza* also reflects the global identity of the organization. It incorporates an Islamic style tower reminiscent of a tower for the call to prayer at a mosque; the sacred emblem of Mahikari incorporates the Star of David; there is a Mayan style fountain, and the inside of *Suza* is decorated with art contributed by *kumite* and notable non-*kumite* artists in genres from all over the world. This is a material expression of the doctrine of Mahikari which states that it is a supra-religion encompassing all religions, and membership in Mahikari does not preclude one from keeping one's faith in a pre-existing religion, be it Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, etc.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have argued that the distinctive organizational style of Sūkyō Mahikari has facilitated its rapid expansion overseas, and the main element of its spiritual culture, the ritual practice of radiating True Light (*mahikari no waza*) has been a powerful factor in establishing uniformity in the value systems and behaviour of members from diverse cultures, through the process of purification of their innermost attitude (*sōnen*). Moreover the occurrence of miracles associated

with the True Light has been the main reason for its global spread. Thus it has been useful to look at religious corporations from the perspective of globalised corporate practices and corporate styles, even though they are located in the spiritual realm in the first instance. Just as corporate cultures are analyzed in terms of ritual theory, so may rituals be analyzed as corporate cultures, as religions globalise and are forced to take on the attributes of large modern organizations.

Notes

- 1) In the wake of several unfortunate incidents around the world involving the mass suicides of the members of several cults, the media have added the investigation of alleged misdeeds of religious organisations to their list of sensational news items.
- 2) A New Religion has been defined as “any religious movement originated by the people themselves independent of the tradition of established religions around and after the mid-nineteenth century in Japan” [TSUSHIMA et al., 1979: 140n]. Even for specialists, it is extremely difficult to create a definition which covers all newly emerging religious movements. Inoue [1991: 5-6] mentions the debate concerning the need to distinguish between a totally new religious movement and one which arises as a form of renewal within an established religion. He concludes “most students consider a religion to be ‘new’ if it is begun by a new leader and called by a new name. Similarly, distinction is difficult in the case of folk religions focusing around a shamanic leader. Here, Inoue recommends that we focus on the “degree of novelty in ideals or purposes demonstrated by the group”. According to Shimazono (1992, as outlined in READER 1993: 235) the “new New Religions” which emerged after World War II and particularly those which have shown dynamic growth in the 1970s and 1980s, are distinguished by a focus on immediate benefit in the here and now in their practices and beliefs and on the abilities demonstrated by the charismatic leaders of the movements (see KOEPPING, 1977: 117-120). Thus the new New Religions offer tangible benefits and salvation in this world, as opposed to the otherworldly focus of Buddhism. Importantly, in New Religions such as Mahikari, belief in the purifying power of God’s Light is linked to ethical systems in a very this-worldly context. New Religions teach that one’s fate is not solely determined by the power of God or other transcendent beings, but that one can achieve salvation and happiness in this life by one’s own efforts, such as changing one’s attitude and daily behaviour [SHIMAZONO 1993: 293]. In the case of Mahikari it is recognised that the ability to change internally is greatly enhanced by receiving the True Light from the Creator God. Given their emphasis on spiritual matters in the here and now, New Religions are thus more acceptable to individuals operating within the world of competitive values typical of modern capitalist society [READER 1993: 236]. Shimazono also emphasises the importance of the spiritual status of the individual, as opposed to that of the family or the community, as in the established religions or folk religion in Japan. In Mahikari this is represented by the belief in an individual’s guardian spirit and individual spiritual advancement.
- 3) In terms of spiritual lineage, Okada Kotama was formerly a member of Sekai Kyūseikyō (Church of World Messianity), founded in 1934, which has a similar practice of *jorei*, the transference of Light to purify the spiritual body. The founder of Sekai Kyūseikyō, Okada Mokichi, had been a member of Omoto from the 1920s until 1931. Interestingly, both the Okadas were businessmen who suffered ill health and financial collapse before founding their organisations.

- 4) “*Ki*” is defined by McVeigh [1992a: 55] as “a vitality or essence underlying existence.” In systems of Chinese traditional medicine, or the martial arts or other arts such as calligraphy, this spiritual energy can be mobilized to create sublime results, sometimes defying the logic of the physical realm.
- 5) It was explained to me that within the Mahikari centres, the identification of those attending as *kamikumite* or *mikumite* (non-members) was very important so that non-members do not become neglected unknowingly. This fact, or the *dōjō* of origin for members, was recorded on a sheet of paper at the entrance. The log also included time of arrival and departure and whether the person received *okiyome*. The strong emphasis on membership status, along with verbal and physical symbols, is a striking element of the corporate culture of Mahikari. (In some centres in Japan, non-members were required to wear a badge identifying them as such, a large badge with red and white circles in one, a yellow woollen pom-pom in another. This was not required in the Australian *dōjō*). Within the *dōjō*, new individuals were always introduced as *kumite* or non-*kumite*. Non-*kumite* were made to feel very welcome and were offered the True Light as often as they wished without any obligation to join Mahikari. Obviously a non-member would not be able to transmit the True Light, but newcomers may not understand this. As a non-member I was welcome to participate in the *dōjō* morning opening ceremony. However when it came to the purification of the environment, when people stood in a large group and rotated on the spot around 360 degrees transmitting the True Light with raised hands, I attempted to copy them and was respectfully told to leave my hands at my sides.
- 6) This practice is also known as *okiyome* (purification), *tekazashi* (raising the hand), *Mahikari no Waza* (the practice of Mahikari). The transmission of True Light is the central feature of the Mahikari movement. The actual experience benefits both the giver and the receiver. If both are *kamikumite*, they take turns in giving each other the True Light. Members emphasise that the experience of True Light is more important than any intellectual understanding of the teachings. Only with the experience of True Light will true understanding develop. In fact, members often undergo the primary training and receive the *Omitama* before they fully understand or accept all the teachings. But with continued experience of the True Light, they come to understand the significance of the teachings.
- 7) This has been variously mentioned as from 30 to 70 percent [CORNILLE 1991: 270]. While more authoritarian religions may also experience a high dropout rate, in the case of Mahikari, there is no pressure put on lapsed members to return. They are referred to as “non-active” or hibernating members.
- 8) It is interesting to note this same feature of the Dejiao movement, a new religion which arose in Canton province in Southern China in 1939 and has established a powerful presence in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. Members claim that the central features of “the world’s five great religions” (Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and Islam) are included in the teachings of Dejiao. “The sympathetic understanding of Confucianism; the compassionate consideration of Buddhism; the virtuousness of Taoism; the universal love of Christianity; the magnanimity of Islam: all of these virtues are fundamentally the same. Therefore all of these so-called five world religions are but branches of Dejiao” [YOSHIHARA 1988: 203-204]. It could be argued that such inclusivist doctrines represent a recruitment strategy, but from a doctrinal perspective, in the case of Sūkyō Mahikari, they mirror its assertion that it is a system of supra-religious belief, which embodies and transcends the commonly shared spiritual principles of particular religions.
- 9) For a comprehensive discussion of the use of symbols in Mahikari, see Knecht [1995].
- 10) See McVeigh 1992b for a discussion of these practices in Japan. Australian and other

- overseas Mahikari members faithfully preserved these standards of ritual purity.
- 11) Along with the monetary offering, a small slip of paper is included, bearing the name of the giver, the amount and the reason for offering, either *otamagushi*, which indicates that the giver wishes to establish a relationship of gratitude with God through the offering, or for *okiyome*. As a non-*kumite*, my offerings always had to be purified by a member before I could place them in the box.
 - 12) Although cigarettes are not generally lit, several members described how they sometimes offered lit cigarettes and the smoke was seen to be sucked up towards the tablet of the ancestor who enjoyed smoking.
 - 13) All the Regional chiefs are directly appointed by *Oshienushisama*, as they are considered to be spiritual appointments. All those with formal roles in the organization speak of their appointment in the sense of having establishing a spiritual cord with *Oshienushisama*. The *buchō* of the Australia/Oceania Region told me that the actual management of the region is conducted locally in an autonomous way.
 - 14) Giddens [1989: 745] defines organization as “a large group of individuals, involving a definite set of authority relations” Furthermore, a bureaucracy, as one type of modern organization, is defined as “a type of organization marked by a clear hierarchy of authority, the existence of written rules of procedure, and staffed by full-time, salaried officials.” [735] In the context of the need to organize a growing membership on a global scale, Sūkyō Mahikari has developed a modern organisational structure, similar to the description of a bureaucracy, with very efficient communication channels between the levels of the hierarchy. Although it takes a different theoretical point, the interplay between hierarchical relations and ritual in Sūkyō Mahikari is a major theme in McVeigh’s paper [1992c] “The Authorization of Ritual and the Ritualization of Authority: the Practice of Values in a Japanese New Religion.”
 - 15) The intensive *dōshi* training course is open to all nationalities and is conducted at the special *Dōshi* Training Institute in Takayama in the Japanese language. There have been 35 classes of graduates so far, and *dōshi* identify themselves as “of the class of 1987” for instance, and know of the graduation years of their fellow *dōshi*, much as members of Japanese companies identify themselves in terms of senior or junior status by their year of recruitment. There is no notion of spiritual seniority among *dōshi* however. *Dōshi* must have the permission of their parents before undertaking the course. Mahikari emphasised family harmony and respect for ancestors. Thus it would be counterproductive if parents were strongly opposed to their child’s wish to become a *dōshi*. From thirty to fifty applicants are usually selected each year, from a field of several hundred. Selection is by interview, including interviews with parents, who are required to be members of Mahikari also. Foreign applicants are recommended by the Regional Headquarters chief. Male applicants should be no older than 35 (younger for females) and *dōshi* trainees are expected to be single because they must live in the “bachelor” dormitory accommodation at the Training Institute and then be posted for practical training to any centre in the world for two years. The living conditions at the Training Institute are spartan, living expenses are provided by *Oshienushisama* and their personal income thereafter is minimal. About ten percent of each class are non-Japanese. Women slightly outnumber men as *dōshi* trainees, but they are required to resign from the role after marriage. It is considered not possible for them to be able to manage the duties of a *dōshi* and female family roles concurrently. After marriage and motherhood, many remain active members of Mahikari centres and assume the role of *junkambu*. Male *dōshi* often remain unmarried until their late thirties or forties, and live a spartan existence in the *dōjō* itself, serving God 24 hours a day, giving Light to members, helping the centre chief,

- maintaining the centre and looking after the *Goshintai* along with rostered members who come to do *toneri* (sleeping overnight at the centre), as the *Goshintai* is never left unattended.
- 16) Spier [1986: 55] describes the same practice when visiting the headquarters of the Agon-Shu, another Japanese New Religion.
 - 17) This can be seen as an example of Australianisation.
 - 18) *Mahikari Australia and Asia Journal*, *Sūkyō Mahikari* and *Sūkyō Mahikari* (in Japanese), respectively.
 - 19) Even in the *dōjō* in Australia there is a simultaneous translation service provided in Japanese by the Japanese wife of Dr. Tebecis at the monthly *Shidōbu* ceremony and other major ceremonies. Unlike other Japanese New Religions in Australia however, the membership of Mahikari is not based on a migrant Japanese community, or a migrant community of other ethnic origins, and the Japanese members in Mahikari centres in Australia, the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia are no more than a handful.

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