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THE PURSUIT OF TANGIBLE HAPPINESS RELIGION AND POLITICS IN A JAPANESE 'NEW, NEW RELIGION'

Abstract

Religion and politics have long been intertwined in Japan, to the extent that it is often difficult to draw lines of distinction between one realm and the other. The ancient Japanese term for the affairs of the state—*matsurigoto* 政 (lit., festival doings)—is a classic instance of this, implying as it does “the unity of worship and rule” (*saisei itchi* 祭政一致). In modern times, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 brought with it a renewed fusion of religion and state, in the guise of State Shinto. Japan’s defeat in 1945, however, saw a turn—both legal and social—towards a Western style “separation of Church and State.” At the same time, the decline of traditional religions led to an explosion of so-called “new religions” (*shin shūkyō* 新宗教), many of which have made forays into the political realm. The best known—and most controversial—example of a “political” new religion is Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, a lay Buddhist movement originally associated with the Nichiren sect that in the 1960s gave birth to a new political party, Komeitō 公明党 (lit., Clean Government Party), which in the past several decades has emerged as the third most popular party in Japan (as New Komeitō). Since the 1980s, Japan has also seen the emergence of so-called “new, new religions” (*shin shin shūkyō* 新新宗教), which tend to be more technologically savvy and less socially concerned (and, in the eyes of critics, more akin to “cults” than the earlier new religions). One new, new religion known as Kōfuku-no-Kagaku 幸福の科学 (lit., Institute for Research in Human Happiness or simply Happy Science), founded in 1986 by Ōkawa Ryūho 大川隆法, has very recently developed its own political party, Kōfuku Jitsugentō 幸福実現党 (The Realization of Happiness Party). This article will analyse the political ideals of Kōfuku Jitsugentō in relation to its religious teachings, in an attempt to situate the movement within the broader tradition of religio-political syncretism in Japan. In particular, it will examine the re-

46

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cent “manifesto” of Kōfuku Jitsugentō in relation to those of New Komeitō and “secular” political parties such as the Liberal Democratic Party (*Jimintō* 自民党) and the Democratic Party (*Minshutō* 民主党).

Keywords

Happiness, religion and politics, Japanese new religions, Kōfuku-no-kagaku, 2009 election, Kōfuku Jitsugentō, Okawa Ryūhō, New Komeitō, Sōka Gakkai, Nichiren Buddhism.



The world remains embroiled in wars and disputes. Within Japan, as well, values are in disarray, while cases of bullying, suicide, crime and the like are increasing. Furthermore, with tense conditions among Asian countries, we cannot even protect ourselves as a sovereign nation, so the existence, assets, and security of the people are in danger. In such a world situation, The Realization of Happiness Party will take bold action to realize the happiness of the Japanese and all the world’s people, and bear the responsibility of increasing happiness in order to bring about an ideal future (“RHP Manifesto” 2009, 1).

For a nation whose politics is not known for its drama, Japan’s national parliamentary elections of August 30, 2009, produced a stunning, if not totally unexpected result, as the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Jp. *Minshutō*, hereafter DPJ) soundly defeated the reigning Liberal Democratic Party (Jp. *Jimintō*, hereafter LDP), the party that had ruled Japan almost without interruption since the late 1950s. Expectations for Hatoyama Yukio’s new administration remain extraordinarily high, and it is a matter of some debate whether the DPJ can fulfil its ambitious campaign proposals and actually bring about the change they promised during the election. Lost, however, within the news reports of the evening—which focused, understandably, on the scale of the DPJ “wave” and humiliation of the once-mighty LDP—was any information regarding the fate of a fledgling party that rivalled the DPJ and LDP both in number of standing candidates and ambitions: The Realization of Happiness Party (Jp. Kōfuku Jitsugentō, hereafter RHP). Formed just months before the 2009 election, RHP was the brainchild of Ōkawa Ryūhō, the founder and charismatic leader of one of Japan’s most popular new religious movements: Kōfuku-no-Kagaku (hereafter KNK). This article will discuss the political ideals of RHP in relation to the religious teachings of its parent organiza-

tion, KNK, in an attempt to situate the movement within the broader tradition of religio-political syncretism in Japan. In particular, it will examine the manifesto of The Realization of Happiness Party in relation to the manifestos of rival political parties such as New Komeitō and the DPJ. Finally, it will explore various perspectives on the freedom of religion and the separation of church and state, as enshrined in Articles 20 and 89 of the Japanese Constitution.

Kōfuku-no-kagaku

In October 1986, thirty-year old Tokyo University graduate and former trading company employee Ōkawa Ryūhō¹ founded an organization called Kōfuku-no-kagaku, which translates literally as the Institute for Research in Human Happiness.² As with most of the new religious movements that have burgeoned in Japan since the 1868 Meiji Restoration, and particularly since the end of the Second World War, KNK is a hybrid of various Japanese religions, including Shinto and Buddhism, in addition to features that appear to be drawn from Western sources, including Christianity, science fiction and the occult.³ Moreover, as the group's name clearly indicates, KNK shares the general emphasis of most Japanese religions—whether traditional or “new”—on this-worldly success and “tangible happiness.” At the same time, other features of KNK—including its reliance on modern technology, incorporation of psychic phenomena and spiritualist elements, and the position and status of its charismatic founder and leader—allow it

48

² Ōkawa's name at birth was Nakagawa Takashi; Ōkawa Ryuho is his adopted, “holy” name, formed by replacing the Sino-Japanese character *naka* (middle) with *ō* (great), and appending the character *hō* (Dharma) to the end of his given name. See Astley 1995 for a comprehensive discussion of Ōkawa's life as well as the early development of Kōfuku-no-kagaku.

³ In February 2008 the group decided to change its official English name to “Happy Science.” Though the precise reasons for the switch remain obscure, one can assume that it was done to present a brighter face to foreign recruits. Whatever its demerits, it is certainly less formal than “The Institute for Research on Human Happiness,” which sounds like a scholarly think tank, and less foreign than Kōfuku-no-kagaku, which means nothing to non-Japanese speakers.

⁴ Ōkawa's father, Nakagawa Tadayoshi, who had studied Christianity and been a member of several new religious organizations including Seicho-no-Ie and the God Light Association (GLA), apparently “taught both his sons the basics of the Bible, Zen Buddhism, Kantian thought and the Communist Manifesto,” and played a significant role in influencing his son to become a religious leader (Fukui 2006, 299). Under the assumed name Yoshikawa Saburō, the elder Nakagawa would come to play a significant role in the development of KNK (though his identity as Ōkawa's father remained hidden until 1995; see Astley 1995, 377).

to be classified as a “new, new religion” (Jp. *Shin shin shūkyō*)⁴—or even, as some critics would have it, a “cult.” In this section, I will briefly delimit the primary teachings and development of KNK over the past two decades.⁵

The basic thrust of KNK teachings is simple: by following the advice of Master Ōkawa, one will achieve success in this world and happiness in the world to come. This, of course, is a common theme for many world religions—at least those with a historical or legendary founder and some sense of an afterlife. Also like many of the major world religions, KNK claims that its teachings are universal; i.e., they apply to all people in all places at all times, regardless of gender, ethnicity, language, social status or prior religious affiliation.⁶ Somewhat more distinctive, though also found in some of the more syncretistic Asian traditions, is KNK’s conviction that all religions ultimately stem from the same source—and that, by extension, the present disputes and differences between religions are a result of human ignorance and/or “sin.” What is required, then, is a new “revelation,” which will bring forth a new leader who will usher in an age of peace and prosperity—a “Utopia” (“What is?” 2009).

This final notion is one that is widespread among new religious movements across the globe, with the Baha’i faith founded by the Persian prophet Bahá’u’lláh (1817–1892) in the nineteenth century being the most obvious and successful example. In many ways, Ōkawa’s claims and status within KNK are an East Asian equivalent to the claims and status of his Baha’i forebear. Whereas Bahá’u’lláh claimed lineal descent from Abraham and Zoroaster in addition to the requisite revelation from a divine messenger, KNK asserts that Ōkawa is a reincarnation of the Buddha who achieved full enlightenment in 1981, during which time he “awakened to the hidden part of his consciousness, El Cantare, whose mission is to bring happiness to all humanity” (“What is”

⁵ The theory of a second phase of new religious movements, classified as *new, new religions*, arose within Japanese scholarship in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In a classic essay on the issue, Nishiyama Shigeru (1979) separated the new, new religions into two categories: 1) sectarian movements with an eschatological fundamentalism; and 2) cultic movements with a strong magical and mystical orientation. KNK seems to fall within both of these camps. See also Mullins 1992.

⁶ See Nijū 1991 for a discussion of KNK’s early development, and Astley 1995 for an overview of KNK doctrine and elaborate cosmology; much of this is gleaned from Ōkawa 1991a, 1991b, 1991c.

⁷ According to KNK’s website, “People from all backgrounds, cultures, professions and faiths, whether Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu or others, have been attracted to our open movement and unique teachings – studying together in joy, harmony and deep-found respect” (“What is?” 2009)

2009). Thus, while KNK roots itself in traditional Buddhist teachings and cosmology, including the belief that Buddhas and bodhisattvas can manifest or “reincarnate” as human beings, it extends the concept in a Baha’ian fashion by suggesting that there is a universal source or principle—called “El Cantare”—that is even more fundamental and powerful than the achievement of buddhahood. According to Ōkawa, El Cantare is the “Grand Spirit of the Terrestrial Spirit Group.” In Mahāyāna Buddhist understanding, El Cantare might be seen as the Dharma Body of the Buddha—a manifestation of truth or reality itself, though the concept also seems reminiscent of the Terrestrial *kami* of traditional Shinto understanding, including Sarutahiko-Ōkami, who in the *Kojiki* acts as a guide when the Heavenly *kami* descend to the world. In 1991, the year that Ōkawa made public his true identity as El Cantare,⁷ KNK obtained Religious Juridical Persons (Jp. *shūkyō hōjin*) status, thus officially becoming a “religion” according to Japanese law.

As noted above, the fundamental thrust of Ōkawa’s message is “happiness”—which, though generally defined in this-worldly terms, goes beyond simple materialism to include a “spiritual” dimension.⁸ The Four Principles of Happiness (Jp. *Kōfuku no genri*) are: Love (Jp. *ai*), Knowledge (Jp. *chi*), Self-Reflection (Jp. *hansei*), and Progress or Development (Jp. *hatten*). To follow these is to follow a “Fourfold Path” that is explicitly modelled on the traditional Buddhist Eightfold Path. Above all else, followers of KNK are to practice the quest for “Right Mind” (or “Buddha Mind”) and work towards the establishment of Utopia (or “Buddha Land”) on earth. In addition to encouraging traditional Buddhist techniques of meditation, Ōkawa also adopts the Buddhist principle of reincarnation, though with the specific understanding that humans are reincarnated only every 300 years or so (on aver-

50

⁸ The announcement was made in the following words at the July 1991 “Birthday Festival” held at the Tokyo Dome: “The one who stands before you is Ōkawa Ryūhō, yet it is not Ōkawa Ryūhō. The one who stands before you and speaks the eternal God’s Truth is El Cantare. It is I who possess the highest authority on earth. It is I who have all authority from the beginning of the earth until the end. For I am not human, but am the Law itself” (Ōkawa 1991b, 16–17).

⁹ If nothing else, Ōkawa is a prolific writer. The author of several hundred books, his oeuvre includes essays on various topics, including advice on daily spiritual practice, meditation, prayers, reports of communication with figures from the spirit world—including virtually all the founders of the world’s religions as well as philosophical and scientific luminaries such as Socrates, Swedenborg, Nostradamus, Isaac Newton and Thomas Edison—of travel between dimensions, on aliens (who resemble Scandinavians), snippets of personal biography, and commentary on contemporary economic and political matters. What follows is taken from a review of a number of Ōkawa’s writings in Japanese, especially the trilogy of *Taiyō no hō* (1991a), *Ōgon no hō* (1991b) and *Eien no hō* (1991c)—though these points are also summarized on the KNK website.

age). During the short time they have in this world, they are expected to “polish” their souls in preparation for the establishment of Utopia. Here again, KNK puts its distinctive spin on the traditional Buddhist teaching of the “Three Jewels”—Buddha (i.e., El Cantare/Ōkawa), Dharma (i.e., KNK teachings) and Sangha (i.e., KNK)—that are indispensable for anyone hoping to follow the path.

Finally, there is a distinctive eschatological thread within KNK, which finds its locus in the general concept of the present and immediate future being a time of “world renewal” (Jp. *yonaoshi*).⁹ This eschatological aspect came to the fore in what Yamashita classifies as the second phase of KNK (1992–1996), during which Ōkawa’s writings moved away from their earlier focus on spirit channelling and towards the formulation of a more explicit classification of spiritual realms (and, it should be noted, towards a clearer identification with Buddhism). In this period Ōkawa began to publish explicit criticisms of both Aum Shinrikyō and Sōka Gakkai as the products of “evil spirits” whose continued existence would only exacerbate the coming world crisis (Yamashita 1998, 139). Following the Aum Shinrikyō Incident¹⁰, however, as popular opinion moved sharply against religious organizations—both traditional and new—KNK shifted into a new phase, in which the focus became much more on the benefits of day-to-day practice and training. While the eschatological element remains, it now seems to be subsumed within the broader framework of “world renewal” through human activity, both individual and socio-political.

Kōfuku-no-kagaku gained hundred of thousands of adherents in the early 1990s, though its popularity seems to have reached a plateau by the end of the decade. Still, as of 2009 the group claims to have over fifteen million followers worldwide, and maintains 32 main temples (*shoshinkan*) and roughly 200 branch temples in Japan, in addition to six international temples (in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, London, Seoul and Taiwan) and 37 international offices. The group’s international headquarters are located in Tokyo. While the group is certainly one of the most significant new religious movements in Japan, it has faced criticism and, like most new religions, is

¹⁰ See Yamashita (1988, 125–26) for a discussion of the use of the term “eschatology” to translate the Japanese *shūmatsu-ron*.

¹¹ On 20 March 1995, members of Aum Shinrikyō, under the direction of Okawa’s bitter rival Asahara Shōkō, released lethal sarin gas on five trains in the Tokyo subway, killing a dozen and injuring hundreds.

often treated with suspicion or disdain in the popular press and by many ordinary Japanese.¹¹

The Realization of Happiness Party

On May 23, 2009, Ōkawa established a national political party entitled *Kōfuku Jitsugentō*—literally translated as The Realization of Happiness Party—with himself and his wife, Ōkawa Kyoko, as joint presidents.¹² The party, formed in anticipation of the August national lower-house elections, would eventually field a total of 337 candidates (including 75 women) in 288 of the country’s 300 constituencies, a feat only rivalled (though not, RHP was quick to point out, surpassed) by Japan’s two major political parties, the DPJ and LDP. This in itself was an impressive feat of organization, attesting to a breadth—if not necessarily depth—of support for this religious political movement. And yet, the election results were disappointing, to say the least. As expected, the “DPJ wave” was the story of the evening, as the long-time opposition party under Hatoyama Yukio finally achieved its desired “regime change” with a devastating win over Prime Minister Asō Tarō’s LDP. The Realization of Happiness Party, which had hoped to pick up at least a few proportionally assigned seats under Japan’s mixed system, was shut off the board. Though most final tallies failed to distinguish RHP votes from those garnered by candidates from the other eight minor parties along with independents, the party claims to have received just over one million votes (or 1.4% of total votes cast) (“Giseki” 2009). The following is a translation of a statement read by Acting Party Leader Motochikawa Zuishō on the morning after the elections. It is hard not to hear a note of surprise mixed with regret in the final line:

52

¹² KNK’s most famous dispute was with *Kōdansha*, a major Japanese publishing house, which published a series of critical articles on KNK and Ōkawa in several of its magazines in 1991. The organization sued *Kōdansha*, as well as the writers involved—including several academics—and KNK was eventually awarded a small sum in damages (Astley 1995, 370–72; Fukui 1999, 151).

¹³ Ōkawa Kyoko would eventually step down as co-president to become KJT’s Chief Advertising Officer. On 15 August, just two weeks prior to the 30 August election, it was suddenly announced on the RHP website that, in order not to split the conservative vote, Ōkawa would take his own name off the ballot. However, for reasons unexplained, this decision was reversed on 18 August.

This time around, we received one million seventy thousand votes in single member constituencies. However, this was not enough for us to produce a successful candidate. We think this is because the reputation of our candidates and our party were not established enough to withstand the force of the desire in this election for regime change. *Further, as the number of our votes was far below the number of Kōfuku-no-kagaku adherents, it would seem that our followers distinguished their personal beliefs from their political choice.*¹³ (“Giseki” 2009, my emphasis)

Despite the peacenik, even ‘new-agey’ appeal of the KNK’s website and much of its promotional literature, the political platform of its offshoot RHP leans firmly to the right of the Japanese political spectrum. What follows is a brief analysis of the party’s official manifesto for the 2009 elections. The introduction to the manifesto, which is signed not by Ōkawa but rather by Acting Party Leader Aeba Jikido¹⁴, begins in dramatic fashion, with a semi-apocalyptic proclamation on the current state of global and domestic affairs, followed by a promise that RHP is the party to lead us out of the darkness and into the light (see leading quote to this article). Of note is the emphasis on RHP as a global leader, which hints at future political plans of a broader, international scope.¹⁵ For the present, however, the emphasis is on rebuilding a fractured Japan, in order to create a “vanguard” nation that will work as a benevolent and “responsible” world leader.¹⁶ This is followed by some ambitious economic proposals, such as doubling stock prices and increasing GDP by 3%, and a promise to encourage “hard work” in order to create a nation of “successful people” that will be the envy of the world, and will make the Japanese themselves feel “fortunate to have been born in Japan” (“RHP Manifesto” 2009).

The first section of the manifesto lays out RHP’s economic proposals in schematic form, including the promise to increase GDP by “aggressive monetary easing, tax reduction policies, and various forms of deregulation,” and effectively double stock prices “by means of an

¹⁴ “Giseki” 2009. One reporter who spent time on the election trail with RHP also noted his surprise at the result: “Can it really be that a religious organization that inspires so much passion can only get 10 percent of its members to vote for its political wing?” (“Giseki” 2009). What this reporter may be missing is the fact that many if not most of these “members” are only loosely connected to RHP. See Astley 1995, 352–54, for a discussion of KNK membership numbers.

¹⁵ On 18 August 2009, Aeba would be replaced as Acting Party Leader of RHP by Motochikawa Zuishō.

¹⁶ Those conversant with Ōkawa’s earlier writings might recall the last chapter of *The Terrifying Revelations of Nostradamus* (1991d), which outlines in fair detail the reemergence of Japan as a global military power at the end of the twentieth century, followed by its conquering the world by force by 2020 and bringing forth with its benevolent rule a new golden age for all humanity.

¹⁷ “We are drawing the blueprint of a future in which Japan—as a major power in economics, technology and culture—assumes a strong sense of responsibility and duty and becomes a world leader in the promotion of ‘peace and prosperity’” (“RHP Manifesto” 2009).

economic stimulus policy, a review of the tax system for securities, and a relaxation of restrictions on foreign capital.” Section number two takes up the issue of education, with specific mention of the problem of bullying—a serious social problem in Japan—and the overreliance on “cram schools.” In section three, political issues take center stage, the North Korean problem in particular. Under the general promise to “defend against threats from neighboring countries and protect the security of our people,” RHP promises to amend Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, the well-known “pacifist clause” that prohibits the nation in perpetuity from maintaining a true “army.” The language here is interesting, as it suggests that the article will be “amended” so the Japanese can “establish our right to protect our nation.” Article 9, of course, does allow for self-protection, including the existence of a Self-Defense Force, which already acts in many ways like regular armed forces. What the RHP manifesto implies is that the present Article 9 gives Japan the appearance of a weak or “irresolute” nation, thus making it more vulnerable to attack—especially from “neighboring countries” such as an unpredictable North Korea and a resurgent China. As a testament to the power of “world peace” discourse in contemporary Japan, the final point in this section states that the only “realistic” chance for world peace will come through a combination of a “spirit of religious tolerance” and the abolition of nuclear weapons—or at least, those “in the hands of aggressive nations” (“RHP Manifesto” 2009).

54

After this tripartite introduction, the RHP manifesto is divided into the following five major sections: 1. Increasing the happiness of working people. 2. Increasing the happiness of women and the elderly. 3. Increasing the happiness of children. 4. Increasing the safety of the nation’s people. 5. Increasing the prosperity of the world.

Much of what can be found in section I is fairly standard “conservative” (or, in European political terms, “liberal”) politics—i.e., freer trade, lower corporate taxes (I.1), promises of increased productivity (I.4)—though with a stronger emphasis on government support for struggling companies (I.2). What initially appears to be a series of “green” proposals—constructing “cities of the future” and eliminating urban traffic—somewhat surprisingly leads to proposals to create “underground expressway tunnels,” more overpasses, and an increase in air travel via “small jets” (I.3). Section II introduces a number of proposals related to women and the elderly, including increasing efficiency in hospital administration via privatization (II.2), repealing the inheritance tax (II.5) and providing subsidized housing in “convenient urban areas”—in order to allow women to work near home, thus

helping solve the problem of declining birth rates (II.4). Perhaps most interesting here is the proposal to allow more foreigners to enter the country, “to work as babysitters or housekeepers” (II.3). Again, this is suggested as a partial solution to the problem of declining birth rates, and may be considered part of RHP’s long term aim to raise the Japanese population to 300 million. Section III reiterates the promise to crack down on bullying in schools (III.1), and once again proposes to increase efficiency and leadership in the education system (III.3) in order to build a system that will “create geniuses” (III.4).

Section IV fills in some details regarding RHP’s foreign policy proposals, with the central focus being on “protect[ing] the safety of the nation’s people from the threats of neighbouring countries.” Here, again, the promise is made to amend Article 9 (IV.1), in order to build a “resolute nation” that “will hold off military threats from China and North Korea” (IV.2). With regard to the vexed issue of historical understandings between Japan and China, RHP takes a firm stance, insisting, “it is only once this issue has been abandoned that we can talk about Sino-Japanese peace” (IV.2). Furthermore:

We will construct defences with the ability to counter-attack missile strikes from North Korea. We will build a nuclear deterrent force that uses nuclear submarines and satellites to protect against Chinese missiles aimed at major Japanese cities and the North Korean development of nuclear weapons and missiles. We will take measures to oppose China’s attempt to control the Asian seas by building aircraft carriers and the like, and will preserve order in Taiwan, Okinawa, and the sea lanes to the Middle East. (IV.2).

55

Unlike some Japanese conservatives, RHP embraces the alliance with the United States, citing it as “an axis for Japan’s national interest” (IV.3). At that same time, it hopes to strengthen ties to other nations, including India, Russia, and Australia (IV.3). The sole mention of religion in this section comes in part four, which states the aim to “realize world peace grounded in a spirit of religious tolerance.” The logic here is interesting: since Japan is a country “endowed with a spirit of religious tolerance,” it is incumbent upon Japan to “take leadership in making the abolition of nuclear weapons in the hands of aggressive nations a priority” (IV.4)—despite the fact that section IV.2 (see above) insists upon Japan’s right to build its own “nuclear deterrent force.”

Finally, section V of the manifesto—entitled “Increasing the prosperity of the world”—serves as both a summation and a call to action. The successive points are general: 1) to “create a Japan that is open to the world, and a pivot of global economy, finance, and culture”; and

2) to become “the leader of revolutions in energy, food supply, and space development.” This is followed by a coda entitled “The Founding Ideas of The Realization of Happiness Party,” which deserve full citation:

- To realize an “ideal nation” by means of a religious political party: *As a religious political party based on a principle of tolerance, we aim to create an ideal nation in which citizens will receive spiritual wealth as well as economic prosperity.*
- To realize the goal of becoming a “resolute nation” by means of a responsible political party: *Our nation’s people will bravely amend the constitution by their own hand, and aim to create a “resolute nation.”*
- To realize “true democracy” by means of a conservative political party: *By protecting democracy, as well the foundations of democracy—religious liberty, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press—we will establish principles of liberty and prosperity as supporters of democracy both in and outside the country.*
- Realizing “tangible happiness” by means of a citizen’s political party: *By means of a citizen’s political party that is widely open and listens carefully to the voices of the nation’s people, we will realize the tangible happiness of the people.*

In short, these four “founding ideas” succinctly delineate the character of RHP as a religio-political phenomenon; i.e., one that is self-consciously “religious,” “conservative,” and decidedly populist. And yet, no mention is made in the manifesto of the core doctrines or “theology” of KNK; in particular, the belief in Ōkawa Ryūhō as the reborn Buddha/godhead El Cantare, and related implications for the building of the future Utopia with Japan at the center. So the question remains: do the policy goals of RHP entail belief in Ōkawa/El Cantare as the saviour of “the whole of mankind” (Ōkawa 1994, 297) or are they a purely “secularized” form of the ideals and promises of KNK? Further, in terms of the issue of “separation of church and state,” is this a distinction that makes a difference?

56

Separation Anxieties: New Komeitō

In many respects, RHP’s political policies reflect those of the Japanese center-right, including their most successful predecessor as a “religious-political party,” New Komeitō. Like RHP, the New Komeitō Party (hereafter, NKP), originally founded as Komeitō, or the Clean Government Party in 1964, emerged out of a new religious movement: Sōka Gakkai. One significant difference, however, is that the leader of Sōka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda, decided upon founding the party that it

would be separated from the religious organization. This separation was formalized in 1970. In addition, though Komeitō began as a left-center political force, usually supportive of the Japan Socialist Party and opposed to the ruling LDP, by the time the party had reorganized in 1998 under the heading New Komeitō, its policies had made a sharp shift to the right, and for the next decade NKP served as a valuable LDP ally and coalition partner in several LDP administrations.

At the same time, from the mid-1990s, concerns began to be voiced in the Japanese media and public arena about the role of Sōka Gakkai in national politics, via its various political offshoots. On its party website, NKP addresses head on the subject of its past and present ties with “the Buddhist organization” Sōka Gakkai. After noting that this connection has been used as “a tool of political expediency by the party’s rivals and critics,” the site insists that, while Sōka Gakkai has “provided electoral support to the party until today,” the relation “is no different from that of a political party and any civil group—such as a labour union, for example—that endorses the party, and it has been established as being constitutionally legitimate” (“Views” 2009). This point was reiterated by NKP Chief Representative Takenori Kanzaki at the party’s National Convention in 1999:

New Komeitō has been, and forever remains committed to, the protection of religious freedom and the principle of separation of church and state as stipulated in Article 20 of the Constitution. I wish to declare once again that New Komeitō will not in any way favour, or exclude, any particular religious organization (“Views” 2009).

57

From the other side, as well, Sōka Gakkai has made a point of disassociating itself from direct political participation, as noted by President Einosuke Akiya in 1995:

Sōka Gakkai will not make use of the power of the state to propagate religion, it will not seek to gain special protection and privileges from the state, and it will demand religious neutrality to be maintained by the political party and candidates that it supports (“Views” 2009).

In short, both NKP and its parent organization, Sōka Gakkai, claim strict adherence to Articles 20¹⁷ and 89¹⁸ of the 1945 Japanese Consti-

¹⁸ “Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the state or exercise any political authority. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious acts. The state and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity” (“Constitution,” Article 20).

¹⁹ “No public money or other property shall be expended or appropriated for the use, benefit, or maintenance of any religious institution or association or for any charitable, educational, or benevolent enterprises not under the control of public authority” (“Constitution,” Article 89).

tution, which respectively guarantee freedom of religion and prohibit religious organizations from “making use of political power.” New Komeitō takes pains to explain, however, that these articles were never intended to prohibit any and all political participation by religious groups—as this would be an “intolerable danger to democracy in that it would enable the state to interfere in the affairs of religious organizations” (“Views” 2009). In other words, NKP—and Sōka Gakkai—insist that these articles be properly interpreted, i.e., understood in their historical context as an attempt to avoid the use of religion by the State for its own ideological purposes (as occurred in pre-war State Shinto, which led, among other things, to the persecution of Sōka Gakkai). As stated on its website:

The historical context of this question in Japan is clearly different from the issue of separation of religion and state as discussed, say, in Europe. The problem in Japan has been that the state has historically controlled or co-opted religion, the latter traditionally exploited out of the self-interests of the former. Thus, the primary concern of the Japanese Constitution has been to guarantee independence of religious organizations and freedom of religious belief, protecting them from state interference (“Views” 2009).

Religion and Politics in Japan

While there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of NKP’s (or Sōka Gakkai’s) adherence to Articles 20 and 89 of the Constitution, the issue of “separation of church and state” is indeed complicated by certain unique features of Japanese religious history—both recent and ancient. Religion and politics have long been intertwined in Japan, to the extent that it is often difficult to draw lines of distinction between one realm and the other. The ancient Japanese term for the affairs of the state—*matsurigoto* (lit., festival doings)—is a classic instance of this, implying as it does “the unity of worship and rule” (*saisei itchi*). The arrival of Buddhism as part of the broader Chinese and Korean religio-cultural complex in the sixth century ce helped to consolidate this connection, perhaps best encapsulated in the famous “17-Article Constitution” attributed to Shōtoku Taishi (*kenpō jushichijō*, 604 ce). And perhaps the strongest reason for the acceptance of Buddhism on the part of the Japanese elite was its explicit promise to protect and promote the “harmony of the realm.”

The Nichiren sect of Buddhism, one of a number of new sects that arose during the tumultuous Kamakura period (1185–1333), developed its own interpretation of the relation between religious practice

and social affairs, one that has been continued by its modern-day offshoot, Sōka Gakkai, and, I would assert, also plays a role in the overarching vision of NKP. Nichiren (1222–1282), the founder of the sect, was, along with many of his day, convinced that the surrounding chaos could only mean that the world had reached its “latter days”—in Buddhist tradition, a period known as *mappō* (lit., the end of the Dharma/Buddhist law).¹⁹ Rather than seek release in meditation (as in Zen) or in faith in an otherworldly savior (as in the popular Pure Land sects), Nichiren posited that “salvation” could only be found within society itself—remade according to the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*. According to this understanding, it is incumbent upon visionary leaders to work for social reform, so that a “Buddha land” can be created in which there is both peace and prosperity.²⁰ Such reform obviously includes what we would today call politics, as well as education and various aspects of culture.²¹ The underlying premise behind this religio-political vision is that:

the self and society are mutually intertwined, and, together as one, shape reality. Thus, in conjunction with one’s own transformation and salvation, the surrounding environment will also change and be saved, which in turn will again have an impact on one’s own transformation (Machacek and Wilson 2000, 103).

In modern times, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 brought with it a renewed fusion of religion and state, in the guise of State Shinto. At the same time, after the Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyōiku chokugo*, 1890), religion came to be understood, at least officially, as characterized by “the presence of an individual founder and denominational organization” (Kisala 2006, 8) and, from the Meiji state’s point of view, as being private and voluntary as opposed to public and obligatory. By

²⁰ This eschatological component is shared by most of Japan’s new and new, new religions, including Kōfuku-no-kagaku (see Yamashita 1998). It is also noteworthy that Ōkawa’s very first “spiritual contact” in 1981 was with Nikkō, the main disciple of Nichiren, and his second, with Nichiren himself (Nijū 1991, 65). And yet, over time, Ōkawa became critical of Nichiren’s notion that chanting the *daimoku* prayer was in itself sufficient for attaining Buddhahood. Indeed, this would become the basis for the KNK critique of all Nichiren-inspired religious movements, including Sōka Gakkai.

²¹ See Nichiren’s *Rishō Ankoku-ron* (Nichiren 1990) for the best expression of his religio-political vision.

²² More controversially, it also involves a commitment to “breaking off” the false and erroneous views of others—a practice known within the Nichiren tradition as *shakubuku*, and one for which Sōka Gakkai has been roundly criticized. Interestingly, from 1992 KNK began its own program of “educational action” (*keimō undō*) aimed at distinguishing “true from heretical religion” (Astley 1995, 372)—and this was focused largely on rivals Sōka Gakkai and Aum Shinrikyō. At the same time, Sōka Gakkai has of late—no doubt in response to public criticism—turned away from *shakubuku* towards a principle of *shōju*, which seeks unity between religions.

thus effectively cutting off some aspects of Shinto from the category of religion, the Meiji leaders were able to more readily raise the status of State Shinto as something *beyond religion*—the very essence of the “national body” (*kokutai*) itself. Although all of this officially ended with the end of World War II and the Allied Occupation, the notion that religion is primarily “an internal affair of individuals” was enshrined in the postwar Japanese government as part of the 1951 Religious Corporations Law (*shūkyō hōjin hō*), originally designed to protect religious freedom, but of late employed as a weapon against the encroaching power of groups such as Sōka Gakkai in the political sphere.

The Pursuit of Tangible Happiness

In terms of policies, the platform of New Komeitō can be described as moderately conservative, with an emphasis on internationalism and adherence to non-nuclear principles. Its 2009 manifesto, entitled “Ensuring the Quality of Life,” is in many respects similar to that of RHP. Based on “humanistic principles,” it proposes to reconstruct and empower the nation’s “common citizens” by focusing on five key areas: economic growth, job creation, safety and security, decentralization of government, and internationalization (“NKP Manifesto” 2009). One difference, however, between the manifestos of NKP and RHP is the former’s more explicit populism and anti-corruption emphasis. Another is the latter’s hard-line stance with regard to foreign threats. Both parties make a nod to the “green revolution”—though NKP’s proposals are somewhat more mainstream (see above). Neither manifesto makes direct reference to the religious doctrine or practice of their parent organizations, though both present a vision of socio-political renewal that implies a large-scale transformation in values and within everyday life.

In comparison, the 2009 Manifesto of the DPJ, entitled “Change of Government,” is almost entirely concerned with proposals to revive the domestic economy: ending wasteful spending, increasing child allowance and access to education, creating a unified pension system, revitalizing local economies, and fostering green industries. And yet, the first line of the DPJ Manifesto evokes a utopian vision of a “fraternal society,” in which “each and every person’s life matters [and] people view other’s happiness as their own.” Moreover, one of Hatoyama’s favorite catchphrases on the campaign trail was *yūai*—a compound of the Sino-Japanese characters for “friendship” and “love,” which he

interpreted to mean “fraternity.” To a certain extent, this is standard modern populist rhetoric about the priority of “people” or “values” over “politics” and “vested interests.” And yet, it is hard not to hear within it echoes of Nichiren’s understanding of the dynamic of individuals and society. The difference is that these echoes are fainter in the DPJ and LDP manifestos than in those of the NKP and (especially) RHP.

Herein lies the crux of the matter: what, exactly, is the meaning and purpose of the separation of church and state as understood in the context of postwar Japan—especially with respect to new religious movements that tend to focus on the pursuit of this-worldly, or “tangible,” happiness and success? While the theology and eschatology of KNK includes a heavy dose of spiritualism, the belief in continual rebirth in order to “polish” one’s soul redirects the emphasis back to one’s life in this world—and within society. Moreover, as Yamashita notes, “eschatological movements in Japan are basically of a human-centred, world renewal type, because this world is understood to be in continuity with the spirit world, or the world of the *kami* and Buddha” (1998, 141). As a result, the goals of KNK, Sōka Gakkai, and like movements are often indistinguishable from most political organizations. The doctrine of separation of church and state as developed in the modern West is intended to do two related things: a) protect and preserve freedom of religion for individuals and groups; and b) prevent the state from imposing religious beliefs or practices on individuals or groups. The problem is that both of these points rely on certain assumptions about religious beliefs and practices—namely, that they are distinct from what we might call political or civic beliefs and practices.²² These distinctions have always been blurry in the Japanese context, and may be even more confused in the context of the new religious movements of the post-war era.²³

²³ The program for a conference on the topic of “Religious Organizations and the Politics of Happiness in Japan” held recently at the German Institute for Japanese Studies in Tokyo makes the claim that, while political organizations and religious groups in Japan share a concern with “happiness,” a “significant and obvious difference between religion and politics is that the former refers (to varying degrees) to another world. Promises of spiritual salvation are integral elements of religious teachings” (“Happiness in Japan”). I would submit that this distinction is not so easily upheld in many or most Japanese religions—whether traditional or new.

²⁴ In a piece on the “Separation of Religion and Politics in the Japanese Constitution,” Kobayashi Hiraoko goes so far as to suggest that “the articles of the constitution related to freedom of religion reflect the American way of thinking [and thus we] can regard it as a typical example of the spiritual control by occupation forces of a nation in a state of lethargy after its defeat” (1998).

The Future of a “Religious Political Party”

Despite these blurred lines, a 1977 Supreme Court decision produced the extraordinary claim that “the Japanese constitution, in stipulating separation of church and state, made it an ideal to separate church and state completely” (Kobayashi 1998, 2). This is a position that has been criticized by many, including, as we have seen, Sōka Gakkai and New Komeitō. It would appear that KNK and RHP are even less concerned to adhere to this principle. In an interview the day after the election, RHP Chief Secretary Kobayashi Sōken remarked that, unlike “the preceding religious political party”—by which he means NKP—RHP does not make false pretences of adhering to the separation of church and state, despite the fact that this makes for some “difficult explanations.” In any case, he goes on to say, people are more interested in the party’s specific ideas than their religious affiliation. When asked whether the party will continue to frame itself as a “religious political party,” Kobayashi answers: “By all means, that is the path we will follow” (“Giseki” 2009).

Although one of the earliest and strongest voices of criticism of Sōka Gakkai’s involvement in Japanese politics came from Ōkawa’s Kōfukuno-kagaku—who went so far as to set up a task force in 1995 dedicated to “exposing” Sōka Gakkai²⁴—their take on this matter was quite distinct from secular critics concerned about the principle of separation of church and state. As noted above, Ōkawa had already classified Sōka Gakkai (with Aum Shinrikyō) as a heretical and dangerous religion (Jp. *jakyō*). Thus KNK criticism of Kōmeitō/NKP has nothing to do with the principle of separation of church and state itself. It is based rather on the fear that, if given political support via Kōmeitō/NKP, Sōka Gakkai’s specific *doctrines* and *teachings* would lead people astray—and hinder KNK’s own plans for “world renewal.” If anything, it would seem that KNK and RHP feel less pressure to conform to the separation of church and state than their more prominent rivals. Moreover, despite the KNK longstanding critique of Sōka Gakkai and its political offshoots, it is clear that Nichiren’s general framework of establishing a “Buddha-land” in this world through action that extends “outward” from the individual to the community and nation (and perhaps beyond) is a shared feature of the political movements spawned by both these new religious movements—and may even be a shared foundation of Japanese politics more generally. Whether re-

²⁴ Called “The Association for the Protection of the Nation from Heretical Religions” (Jp. *Jakyō Kara Koku-sei o Mamoru Kai*) (see Astley 1995, 374).

cent talk of revising or rewriting the 1946 Constitution will result in clarification of these gray areas remains to be seen.

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Streszczenie

Swoboda ubiegania się o rzeczywiste szczęście: religia i polityka w nowej japońskiej Nowej Religii

W Japonii religia i polityka od dawna są ze sobą związane do tego stopnia, że często trudno oddzielić jedną rzeczywistość od drugiej. Najlepiej udowadnia to klasyczne, starożytne słowo japońskie na oznaczenie spraw państwa — *matsuri-*

goto 政 (dosłownie, roboty festiwalu), ponieważ zawiera w sobie „jedność kultu i władzy” (*saisei itchi* 祭政一致). Czasy przywrócenia epoki Meiji w 1868 roku przyniosły ze sobą odnowione połączenie religii i państwa pod pozorem Państwa Shinto. Natomiast klęska Japonii po 1945 roku wprowadziła znaczne zmiany zarówno prawne, jak i społeczne w kierunku zachodniego stylu rozdziału Kościoła od państwa. Towarzyszył temu stopniowy upadek tradycyjnych religii i wzrost popularności tak zwanych „nowych religii” (*shin shūkyō* 新宗教), z których wiele spróbowało wejść na arenę polityczną. Najlepszym i najbardziej znanym przykładem takiej politycznej nowej religii jest Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, świecki buddyjski ruch pierwotnie skojarzony z sektą Nichiren, który z kolei w latach sześćdziesiątych przekształcił się w nową partię polityczną Komeitō 公明党 (dosłownie. „Partia Czystej Władzy), będącą w ostatnich latach trzecią najpopularniejszą partią polityczną w Japonii, znaną jako Nowa Komeitō. Od lat osiemdziesiątych powstały również inne tak zwane „nowe, nowe religie” (*shin shin shūkyō* 新新宗教), które są lepiej zorientowane w technologii, a mniej zainteresowane sprawami społecznymi. W oczach wielu krytyków Nowa Komeitō, w przeciwieństwie do swoich poprzedników, jest jednak partią o charakterze zbliżonym do sekty. Jedną z nowej, nowej religii Kōfuku-no-Kagaku 幸福の科学 (dosłownie „Instytut do Badania nad Szczęściem Człowieka, lub po prostu Szczęśliwa Nauka), założona w 1986 przez Ōkawa Ryūho 大川隆法, została niedawno przekształcona w partię polityczną Kōfuku Jitsugentō 幸福実現党 (czyli Partia Realizacji Szczęścia). Artykuł jest próbą analizy ideałów politycznych Kōfuku Jitsugentō w stosunku do jej nauczania religijnego oraz próbą usytuowania tego ruchu w szerszym kontekście synkretyzmu polityczno-religijnego w Japonii. W szczególności skupia się na ostatnim manifeście Kōfuku Jitsugentō, porównując go do deklaracji innych partii świeckich, takich jak Nowa Komeitō, i innych świeckich partii politycznych, np. Partii Liberalno-Demokratycznej (*Jimintō* 自民党) i Partii Demokratycznej (*Minshutō* 民主党).

Słowa kluczowe

Szczęście, religia i polityka, nowe japońskie religie, Kōfuku-no-Kagaku, wybory 2009, Kōfuku Jitsugentō, Okawa Ryūhō, Komeitō, Sōka Gakkai, buddyzm Nichiren.