

New Religions in Japan: Reasons behind the Newness Shafiul Islam¹

Abstract

A new approach of religion got its popularity in Japan since the 19th century and after World War II brought its stronghold too for the new principles in peoples' lives. Japanese are Japanese first and this is how they have been identifying in terms of history, tradition, religion and sociological phenomenon since the very beginning of their existence. "Religion is for better living" could be the possible ideology or motto of their very lives. Japanese soil is occupied with religions like Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Islam and many new religions to promote that finer life. Religiosity, to them, does not differentiate or restrict people to any certain philosophy or a strict ideology but gives them freedom to choose to live on. New religions or new religious movements in Japan brought the very rooted Japanese culture into a new dimension. On which grounds, new religions are called new is the ultimate question.

Keywords: New, Religions, Time, Shinto, Buddhism, Japan.

Introduction

Japan is a beautiful east Asian country with a diversity of religious systems and culture. Here, people have a strong sense of tradition and they like to hold on to it in their everyday lives as well. In term of religion, the country got its inspiration mainly from China and Korea. Except Shinto because it is considered to be a purely Japanese thought and still has its great effects in peoples' mind. Gradually, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity and Islam were introduced to the land. Besides, few hundred new religious movements were originated in Japan since the 19th century. These new principles fulfilled the moral gap of followers along with many earthly incentives. Hence a question came up: 'why were several religions started to be designated as "new"?' There must be some reasonable discussion regarding the

¹ Lecturer, Department of World Religions and culture, University of Dhaka
E-mail : shafiul.crt@du.ac.bd

issue which caused the particular title. Finding that logical answer is the ultimate aim of this paper which needs analysis of different angles of Japanese people and their existing culture. Certain grounds are there to clarify the question and to come up with a reasonable explanation is equally necessary. Therefore, there is a possibility of certain time frame of those new movements which set them apart having a new identity. Several scholars and academicians opined partially but the exact reason did not come out with much clarity to the researchers. A brief introduction of other Japanese religions is crucial to have a better understanding of the study.

Methodology

This paper is primarily based on qualitative approach where data are collected from secondary sources. For the obvious reason, the present method relies mostly on scholarly journals, books and few important internet sources on Japanese religion. For referencing, APA (American Psychological Association Referencing Style Guide) style is followed throughout the paper.

This study is intended to identify the reasons behind some Japanese religious movements which share a common feature and that is 'new'. Why are certain religions called new in Japan? This is perhaps because those religions are framed under some similar motifs, characteristics, cultural influences, distinctive efficiencies and a certain period of origin and development in a fixed territory. A good number of journals and books on Japanese religion are available but they don't have the analysis of this particular study. Existing writings on Japanese new movement have an especial focus on their influences in Japanese society and people. Japanese new religious identity is supported by several crucial factors, but they necessitate precise analysis from their historical context. In addition, different perspectives of these new religions also need to be put together to know the root causes behind this identity.

A philosophical understanding of major religions in Japan and their background is a vital way of finding the truth. Therefore, a proper analysis of the existing data has no alternative to extract the ultimate outcome.

Shinto and Other Foreign Religions in Japan

Shinto, in contemporary Japan, is the prominent belief system followed by Buddhism. To Japanese people, the term "*Shinto*" or "*Kami-no-michi*" means "Way of the Gods or Spirits", and it possesses the philosophy of life for the adherents. (Cobbold, 2009 : 9). Shinto is very different from other religions having no founder, no sacred text and even having no exact origin. (Ellwood & Pilgrim, 1985 : 146). The faith is deeply rooted to the Japanese tradition and culture. In the words of Hirano, "Shinto is such a term which depicts the traditional system of

Japanese social behaviour and its product. This system was developed through their communal life associated with the expression of thanksgiving to *kami*, while they attempt to submit their will to that *kami*, as demonstrated in celebration of festival like *matsuri*², folk performance, and in the day to day activities” (Hirano, 1997 : 57). Therefore, this faith system is formulated on the principle of *Kami* and it is evident throughout the Japanese history.

On the other hand, both Buddhism and Christianity are foreign to the Japanese but both do not have the same sort of effect in peoples’ mind. Buddhism didn’t originate in Japan, but is considered to be the most influential religion among all the foreign religions in Japanese soil. Buddhism entered Japan in 538 C.E. and just after 40 years of arrival was declared as an official religion by Prince Shotoku (574-621 C.E.) for the inner strength of it (Matsunami, 2004). It was supported by the princely classes and has its strong foundation in Japan till now. Here, this faith seems to have drawn elements from Shinto, Hinduism, Christianity, Taoism, Confucianism and folk religion (Matsunami, 2004). Not only Buddhism but this syncretistic nature is also found in other religious components. With the support of Japanese authorities, Buddhism formed around twelve sects in this country (Cobbold, 2009). Among them *Hinayana*, *Sanron*, *Zen*, *Tendai*, *Shingon*, *Nichiren*, *Pure land*, etc. are prominent sects in Japan (Cobbold, 2009). Especially, the Japanese art had been inspired a lot by this faith. After renaissance, Christianity was very active in its missionary activities in all over the world and Japan was not out of its sight. In 1549, Japan met with the Christian ideology by Francis Xavier for the first time (Boxer, 1993). Missionary workers faced several difficulties to settle down their doctrine in the new zone. But Xavier had a very charismatic personality which helped him to preach Christianity among Japanese people. Christianity struggled a lot during its initial development and was banned for the first time in Japan during the reign of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (Sansom, 1978). This is not the only time but it was banned, later on, again in Japan. Japanese people couldn’t accept the faith full heartedly for various practical problems as witnessed. On the other hand, Christianity met with continuous persecution in Japan apart from the princely patronizations. Besides, both Protestantism and Catholicism have a lot of followers in this soil.

A quite different picture is found about Confucianism and Taoism. They were basically Chinese thought but have their considerable influences in Japan. Confucianism did not have that profound establishment in Japan unlike China. Religiously, the expression of it was a bit little. Some Shinto rituals got relative necessity from Confucian thought. Hence, Confucian philosophy of social

² See for details: Honda, S. (1985). *Nihon Shinto nyumon (Introduction to Japanese Shinto)*. Tokyo Nihon bungei-sha.

values, family loyalty, sense of inner personal obligation, etc. had greatly influenced the Japanese people (Ellwood & Pilgrim, 1985). In the same way, Taoism is a Chinese religion founded by Lao Tzu which is prominently based on the sacred text called "*Tao Teh Ching*". Like many other religions, Taoism calls for an ethical way of life. In Japan, it's formulated as a folk religion providing some moral aspects to deal with social and personal problems. Although not directly, but indirectly, it influenced Japanese people having its impact on Chinese Buddhism, especially on Ch'an or Zen. Here, Taoism promoted imagination, feeling and intuition as more powerful means than rationalism (Ellwood & Pilgrim, 1985).

Although Japan met quite a number of foreign faith systems and adapted to those values more or less but had an urgency of new thought also. A thorough discussion along with the timelines, features, social aspects, confrontation with the existing faiths etc. are very necessary for the clarification.

New Religions in Japan

Although, new religions are recent addition in Japan in comparison to the well-established religions, their influences are strongly counted in Japanese society. Why were some religions or movements in Japan fallen under the title of 'New'? This is a vital question which needs to be answered accordingly. Normally, something very immediate is called 'new' which is going to be initiated or used for the very first time. Here, the newness of some religions in Japan is in consideration along with the reasons behind it. Calling something new doesn't necessarily mean to hold it forever. In this present context, following questions are to be discussed for a clear conception. The questions are as follows,

- a. What was the background of new religious movement?
- b. Why are the new religions called 'new'?
- c. How are they characterized as new?
- d. Will these new movements become old considering its time frame?

Answers to these questions require understanding on certain aspects related to the very question: "why new?"

Background of New Religious Movement

Historically, several causes were responsible to the rise and development of new movements in Japan and most of them also got strong scholarly support. Different assumptions and theories had great philosophical hold during the overall movement.

These religions flourished from social, economic and personal levels, not in contrast but alongside major religions, in Japanese soil. Analysis of the entire process wasn't so simple at all. Although, different scholars argued from their distinctive point of views, there were few common grounds. At first glance, established religions had some relative issues with them. Both native and foreign religions were already very formalized before the rise of new religions. As the time passed, these strong establishments had lost their initial zeal in a great deal and religious people had needed some renewal of faith also (Earhart, 1969). New religious movements could satisfy that urgent social necessity and thus opened a flow of development as well. Secondly, Japan had undergone frequent socioeconomic crisis and economic fluctuation in the last two centuries which caused people to have an added psychological unrest. People had been struggling with the lack of spiritual upliftment. However, newly arisen religions managed to gain that public interest and therefore, their development had got a smooth ground unlike established religions. That situation really boosted up many faith systems to develop and many others to rise as well (Earhart, 1974). Thirdly, new religions were gifted with charismatic characters and their mesmerizing influence in people's mind. These figures, subsequently, gained their position in the ongoing social and psychological unrest in Japan. Leaders did extract the necessities as they initiated their belief systems and contributed with both inspirational and structural framework in the gradual progress (Earhart, September 1969). Another strong reason might have been the honest presentation of new religions before the Japanese religious adherents. People's positive understanding on a particular faith must have paved the way for its development (Earhart, 1974). Historically, Japanese followers are known to be very adaptive and reasonable in nature. New faith systems with their certain features had managed to fit that situation from time to time and therefore, got a comparatively easy path to flourish.

These causes were affiliated with many other philosophical and statistical aspects. These, for the obvious reason, need further clarification from their historical happenings and faith-based understanding during their origin and development.

Terminological Identification

The term "New Religion" is simple to understand but its relation to Japanese religion is exceptional which demands critical analysis. Inoue opined about the term, that "new religion" is used as "*shin shukyo*" in Japan. This is a commonly used term in the academic explanation of "new religion" by the scholars for their keen interests regarding it (Huang, 2017 : 2). Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, etc. have their significant influences in Japan and are

actually counted out of new religion but all the other movements, therefore, do not always hold the title of “new religions.” Generally, “*Shin shukyo*” stands in support of the variety of religious movements arose in modern Japan (Nobutaka, 2017 : 11). This general conception of Japanese religions is associated with several historical, social and political facts also. Apart from that, “Newly arisen religions” is another concept to define the Japanese new movements. Newly arisen religions are called “*shinko shukyo*” (Stravelen & Offner, 1963) in Japanese term. Several information is traced from different research works like books, journals, etc. ‘Encyclopedia of the New Religions’ (*Shinshukyo jiten*) is one of them where the term “New Religion” is categorized into four conditions. According to this Encyclopedia, “new religions are such sort of religions which are organized independently of established religions and are primarily composed of the members of common classes” (Nobutaka, 2017 : 11). These conceptualizations, through conditions, of new religion are to define the newly arisen religions from the rest of the religions prevailed in Japan. Distinguishing between new and others are not so easy without providing reasons behind the fact. Initially, all the new religions were on the basis of establishing moral or ethical movements for the people of Japan. Then the independent establishment of those new movements proposed the unique position of them from the non-organized folk beliefs and folk religion. Apart from the segregation between new and established faiths, new religions have distinct status different from the reform movements like sectarian Buddhism and shrine Shinto. There are several revitalization processes that arise from even the established religions in Japan which have their distinct features from the original faith systems (Nobutaka, 2017). But unlike Shinto or foreign faiths, all the new religions have their founders with distinctive charisma.

Time Frame for New Religious Movements

New religions must have a time frame as the essential feature of the term but to bind it in this way is not that easy because of the variety of observations from different scholars and research results. For the trustworthy answer regarding this, a reasonable discussion of the fact finding is very crucial. Different approaches and the logics behind those approaches are to be explained for the accurate outcome. It has more than 200 years historical information where new religions are found to be originated and developed.

At the very beginning of 19th century, probably, the first trace of a new religious movement is found. It was the year 1802 when Kino Isson (1756-1826), a peasant woman, founded a movement named ‘Nyoraikyo’. ‘Nyoraikyo’ is titled as one of the new religious movements in Japan and also one of the earliest

groups under the title of 'new'. It happened in Nagoya and often considered to be first of that movement by many. (Reid, 1991). Sometimes the projection is framed not only limiting the movements into their origin or initiation but through an overall periodic establishment. A research work shows this movements into four time periods: early 19th century, late-Edo period³, early 20th century and the period following the Second World War (1939-1945). At the beginning of 19th century, new religions were found to gain popularity in response to the mountain cults. These cults presented mountains in a sacred way before the religious respondents and it was a long practice which was introduced several centuries back from then. For example, mountain cult 'Fuji-ko'⁴ got its significance as religiously ordained rites. Late Edo period met with few religious establishments which were considered to have major religious impacts. The movements found in this period are termed as Konkokyo, Kurozumikyo and Tenrikyo. These movements brought the sign of newly arisen systems before the common people in Japan. 20th century witnessed many new movements but the early 20th century had few in its possession. Japan felt the power of movements like Reiyukai and Omoto in the early twentieth century along with the development of capitalism. The important thing is the continuity of new movements and the gradual enhancement of number. The fourth phase started with the end of WWII and this is the most significant period for the new religious movements in Japan for the wide-ranging expansion of these ideologies. Separation of state and church was one of the major principles behind the new concept which got attention in peoples' mind. In this particular research, the fourth phase has the most numbered religions under this category (Nobutaka, 2017). In a different way, Professor Hiroo Takagi indicated three distinct periods to point out the establishment of new religions in Japan. The periods are: around the beginning of the Meiji era (1868), around the beginning of the Showa era (1926) and after the end of World War II. Hiroo found the movements satisfying the common interests of people which were not available in other religious conceptions (Saki & Oguchi, 1957). Fulfilling the followers' demands holds one of the core ethical points in support of the new ideologies in Japan.

Another idea, regarding the time frame of new religions in Japan, showed the origin of those movements into six distinct stages. These phases are related to

³ Edo period is also called the Tokugawa period (1603–1867) which is considered to be the golden age for prosperity and peace (Stearns, 2008, p. 1).

⁴ Fuji-ko was associated with the sacred mountain Fuji which was viewed in fact as a Kami. Although the actual nature of it was not widely known but the Japanese scholars are found to have emphasized on the attitude of fear in some pacification rites. (Earhart, 1989, pp.206-207).

special occurrences which took place in the Japanese society and people. Why are certain movements considered within a particular time? This question demands answers because of the reasonable periodic advances of certain movements and their social impacts of that society (Nobutaka, 2017). The stages (Nobutaka, 2017) are as follows,

1. Late Edo (Promulgation of Imperial Constitution).
2. During Russo-Japanese War (Promulgation of Imperial Constitution).
3. After Russo-Japanese War (Showa Depression).
4. End of World War II (Showa Depression).
5. End of WWII (First Oil Shock).
6. End of Showa period (First Oil Shock).

The first period ended the establishment of imperial state in modern Japan which was started as a result of the unrest of the late-Edo period (1603–1867). This was the time of the first appearances of new religious movements in Japan when sectarian Shinto had a great influence over each of the movements. The second period focuses mainly in the year 1904 and 1905. It was the time of Russo-Japanese War when a significant occurrence took part in term of religion. Established religion like Shinto, new religions and some political changes were the three most important events that happened at that time period. This second phase witnessed the growth of some new religions along with the economic rise of Japan. However, the period was too short to have a considerable number of new religions but immediately after that a new era took place. The third period started after the war and it was a period of economical fluctuations. A few numbers of new religions were found in this time and most of them were having influential attachment to mysticism and magic. Omoto and Honmichi are two significant movements during this phase. Some syncretistic approaches were also found as Omoto met with Taireido. At the same time, Omoto and Honmichi placed quite an impact on doctrines of world renewal. Fourth period brought the scenario of economic collapse in Japan and witnessed the appearance of military clique. Religion, under this period, got a stronger control over Japanese followers. Despite the 20th century economic fluctuation in Japan like the third period, end of World War II caused the rise of a bulk number of new religions in that soil also. In the fifth period, an economic renaissance was achieved with a new democratic motion where the first oil shock⁵ forced Japan to observe the country in a different dimension. The period was for peoples' choice to make whether they have strong satisfaction from existing faiths or not. The situation demanded to accept a few new principles to follow. As a

⁵ See for detail: Mihuta. & Daniel, 2012, pp. 1042-1048.

consequence, a natural selection of disappeared groups, growing groups and new origination of ideologies took place in Japan. At the last period, economic stability met with the sound political practice. Therefore, religions having the mystical and magical influences are sometimes referred to as “new new-religions” (Nobutaka, 2017 : 25-26). Analysis was not always on the reasons between religious identities but it has other social, political and economic impacts too. These are inter connected facts where one relies on others to rise or initiate as happened in Japan.

Like the above mentioned timelines, there are several other views on the rise and establishment of new religions in Japan where there was already strong basement of Shinto and Buddhism. Although the movement started mostly at the beginning of the 19th century but better development was seen during 20th century onward. Still the teachings of Buddhism and Shinto have a great influence on the society. There are several new religions which met that sort of inspiration. A rapid growth and development happened during 1930s where Nichiren Buddhism⁶, for example, had a drawing inspiration on the ongoing movements. More specifically, the influences were drawn from the interpretations of the Lotus Sutra by some scholarly figures. Some mass movements happened on this basis were Soka Gakkai, Rissho Koseikai and Reiyukai (Reader, 1988). This process went on to a gradual development increasing the number at different time periods. There was a uniformed position among the new movements as they formed some organizations too for strengthening their inter-relation. The term “new religion” was not always welcomed or even embraced by those movements but have developed systems to promote their togetherness as a message of unity, since WWII to 1960s was another important period for the expansion of new religions in Japan. Some religious adherents, in 1951, formed the “Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan” which was known as the “*Shinshuren*”. *Shinshuren* worked for the promotion of their cooperation and defense of their interests. It doesn't matter much whether some people accepted the term “new religion” or disliked it but all were fallen under the category of this great movement in one way or other (Reader : 6). The new religion like Tensho Kotai Jingukyo, for example, got quite a support from the mass people which was founded during the WWII by the charismatic Kitamura Sayo (1900-1967). There were some significant organizational establishment from 1940s to 1960s which witnessed the formation of several movements and subsequently, common people felt the growth of those religions. That era was not only the era of war but also regarded as the “rush hour of the gods” (McFarland, 1967). Followers have taken other

⁶ See for details: Stone, 1994, pp. 231-259.

initiatives to extend their ideologies to another level. In the year 1946, the “Religious Corporations Ordinance” was promulgated which was followed by the “Religious Juridical Persons Law” in 1951. These initiatives ensured the new religious practitioners’ freedom of activities in the broader society. Subsequently, they caught the eye of media because of their activities and observances. For instance, groups like Jiu and Tensho Kotai Jingukyo managed to attract the media for their performance, but some groups like Soka Gakkai, PL Kyodan, Reiyukai, Sekai Kyuseikyo and Rissho Koseikai did that because of their basic principles. Furthermore, different minor religious confraternities, along with many other organizations, were registered as independent body of religious juridical persons under a church which was related to a recognized religion. This was another progress for them as they could satisfy the mass attention with their status. In the early modern period, new religions were able to persuade their social impact with a thorough development in Japanese lives. Therefore, the result triggered the researchers’ interests about the gradual expansion of those religions. It took time for the movements to flourish but they managed to achieve their position at the end (Nobutaka, 2017). Especially, the “Religious Juridical Persons Law”, which was mainly based on the principle of “authentication”, helped the new ideologies to rise as a corporation and allowed the associated followers to perform their activities as well. This authentication, for any new movement, gave Japanese a sense of strength that they are free to enjoy the new teachings and have the right to preserve a new ideology as well. (Nobutaka, 2017). Subsequently, a safe passage was created to continue their movements.

Another period for the rise and development of new religious movements in Japan is counted between the late 1970s and 1980s. The term “*Shinshukyo*” has been using by the religious scholars to define the new faith systems since then. In addition, a new wave was introduced during this session by the academics and journalists as “*shin Shinshukyo*”. An extra “new” (“*shin*”) was added with the existing “new religions” and thus “*shin Shinshukyo*” stands for “new new religions”. Nishiyama Shigeru introduced this different addition in the late 1970s (Shigeru, 1986; Reader, 1988 : 235-61). Few new religions were categorized under this time period. For instance, Mahikari, Byakko Shinkokai, Agonshu, Shinnyoen, Kofuku no Kagaku and Aum Shinrikyo were significant groups during this phase (Reader, 1988 : 18).

New Religious Movements as Quasi-religions

New religions had to go through under several organizational, juridical and more other set ups for their survival. Under Home Ministry, an ordinance was issued in July 1899 and the ordinance was called “Reporting Regulations Regarding the

Establishment, Transferral, and Discontinuance of Ministers and Facilities of Worship and Teaching for Religions other than Shinto and Buddhism.” All religions except Shinto and Buddhism had to fall under this ordinance for the authorized regulations in Japan. This step of the Home Ministry was followed later on and several other regulatory establishments were arranged for the new movements. This opened the way of continuing the new religious activities by submitting a proper application to the prefectural governor’s office in order to receive the formal approval. Therefore, this period was a period of settlement for the newly arisen faith systems. They were also given a title of “*ruiji shukyo*” (quasi-religions) under that jurisdiction (Nobutaka, 2017). The first appearance of the expression took almost twenty years and the notice was issued in 1919 by Ministry of Education’s Bureau of Religions. It helped all the religions creating a different status from Shinto and Buddhist sects and denominations. As a result, the title was acquired by new religions like Seicho no Ie, Omoto, Hito no Michi Kyodan, Reiyukai and many other movements during this period. Around 21 years later in 1940, the formation was taken one step ahead establishing “*shukyo dantai*” (religious organizations). Under the recognition of “religious organizations”, groups and denominations of Buddhism, Shinto and Christian churches formed a unified law (Nobutaka, 2017). A clearer distinction was made between these three religions and new religious movements in Japan under the consecutive titles of “*shukyo dantai*” and “*ruiji shukyo*”.

Number of New Religions in Japan

Detecting the exact number of new religious groups is another challenge for the researchers and the involved academicians. Very few information or count down are drawn and these are the basis to have an idea on this regard. “Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan” (“*Shinshuren*”) comprises 39 organizations as new religions (Reader, p. 10). Japanese scholars then compiled the “Dictionary of New Religions” (“*Shinshukyo Jiten*”) in 1991. According to this *Shinshukyo Jiten*, there are over 300 movements. Another information, based on the data base of the “Religious Information Research Center” in Tokyo, says the numbers between 300 to 400 (Staemmler & Dehn, 2011). So, the number of new movements in Japan must be around 400 in number and not less than that. All the new religions do not hold same kind of influence but it varies in a large scale too.

Earthly Benefits from New Religions

New religions did not just rise with ethical principles for the followers but brought their attention providing necessary incentives too. Beside dealing with individual salvation, they developed the components for the solution of personal

problems and added value of developing a sense of self-worth. These individual development incentives helped to gain popular attention regarding peoples' everyday lives (Hardacre, 1986). Japanese people trust their culture of strong traditionalism and this can never be separated from them. Both historically and religiously, they have their own traditional beliefs to follow but they are also so adaptive for their well beings as well. Lives are full of ups and downs but to deal with everyday life's problems matters a lot, and this was the zone for the new religions to assist with through advices for particular issues. They offer necessary means of self-cultivation which helps every individual to find out his/her own way of facing the problem and to make it correct. According to new movements, physical illness is not always a material matter but has its connection to spiritual root in many ways. New religions made people understand to deal with that physical problem by receiving moral treatments in life. Mahikari, for example, explains the illness of earthly life as originated from spiritual gaps in human psyche. Sometimes the sickness may seem totally a physical problem caused by any germ but the existence of the germ in the first place is the real concern here (Davis, 1980). New religions came forward with detecting those problems and therefore, attracted people through moral treatments.

One of the unique methods behind the mass attention of new religions is the combination of new ideologies with the traditional Japanese beliefs. The acceptance of new thought was not that difficult for that reason. The new addition with the original aspects made it really Japanese and the title didn't hold back but managed to introduce a newness of life. Power of healing in new religions accelerated the movements in a very positive way. They have a very keen attachment with the Japanese tradition, especially while it's about the techniques of faith healing. These techniques use fire and water for ritual activities. The used water for the rituals is called "*goshinsui*" ("holy water"). To transform ordinary water into that holy water is one of the unique traits of new movements but this mystical power of holy water is interestingly a traditional concept. Some new groups do not only use the water healing techniques but they also place their special emphasize on the doctrines related to that healing power. Sometimes groups are found to involve their own tradition of miracle tales with the water (Nobutaka, 2017). Miracles, apart from *goshinsui*, are traced in many other earthly occurrences. New religion like Renmonkyo has its miraculous effects as the adherents believe in *ji no myoho*. This belief is found to be very effective in dealing with many natural calamities and personal problems. In the Gifu Province, for example, an earthquake destroyed the member's residence but the occupants remained safe. There were many examples of miracles where explanations were quite satisfactory. Another

testimonial explained the situation of a member's son and his business initiatives. The son was a Christian convert but became a believer of *ji no myoho* which changed his condition dramatically. Thirty days after accepting *ji no myoho*, the son found an investor for his business. That was quite a change which enhanced the effect of new religions. The third incident was about a patient with chest disease who lost his hope after medical treatment but was cured later on (Nobutaka, 2017). In the second half of 19th century, Japan felt the epidemic of massive cholera which affected a large number of people. In 1877, cholera spread in several places like Shanghai, Nagasaki and Yokohama. This incident continued until 1895 with several large-scale epidemic. The statistics showed a large number of deaths from those periodic cholera. Initially, 8,000 people died in 1877, the number became 15,000 in 1879, 33,000 after three years in 1882, then 18,000 deaths in 1886, 35,000 in 1890 and finally more than 40,000 people died in 1895. People completely lost their hope and couldn't stop the massive death but they had their faith on Renmonkyo's claim. It was again the power of using holy water to stop cholera (Nobutaka, 2017).

Indeed, the miraculous benefits drove the new religions into source of great inspiration but were also criticized regarding their position of strong doctrines and principles for the followers. Many critics found those movements having weak doctrinal systematization. There can be several negative comments from many scholars but the miraculous benefits are also worthy enough and cannot be neglected at all (Nobutaka, 2017, p. 33).

New Sects or Groups based on Existing Religions

Sometimes new religious movements were not entirely new in terms of moral teachings but had their origin out of already existed religions. In this way, they were either inspired from systems like Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity or they were based on Japanese traditional belief which of course have their new contents for the believers. These new contents made the new appearances and earned the title of "new religion". They have to follow the prescribed rules and regulation to work on. As a consequence, any religion or new ideology needs to be registered under the Ministry of Culture in Japan. The prescribed categories, for the new movements, under the Ministry were very clear: "Buddhist-lineage", "Shinto-lineage", "Christian" and "other" (Reader, 1988). New movements are only considered under mixing of certain inspiration of Japanese religions and their roles to play in Japan. There are specific examples on this regard. The Nichiren Shoshu organization is the progeny of a Buddhist sect which was formed at the Mount Fuji temple Taiseikiji by Nikko. Nikko was one of the six direct disciples of medieval Buddhist saint Nichiren (1222-1282)

(Nobutaka, 2017). Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, etc. in Japan have no such conflict situation with the newly arisen religions in the same soil, though the movement had some issues of dissatisfaction. Indeed, there was no such doctrinal conflict but differences. Most of the new religions have no conflict situation with the major religions in Japan regarding ritual practices. There are several effective traditional rites in Japan like *hatsu miyamairi*, *shichi-go-san*, wedding rites and funeral rites. *Hatsu miyamairi* is about the dedication of newborn infants at shrines and temples. On the other hand, *shichi-go-san* recognizes festivals for three, five and seven-years old children (Nobutaka, 2017). This is how the coexistence occurred among different religions.

Religious Shrine and Freedom of Practice

New religions have freedom of religious practices and the followers need not to have distinct temple, shrine or church to perform but anywhere they like. Existing religions also show their liberal attitude to welcome them warmly considering Japanese strong sense of community. World religions have some exceptions but are likely to have their distinctive religious places for the practitioners to pray and new religions on the contrary enjoy that in a unique way. Japanese were always different than the other as their very syncretistic⁷ nature is concerned. It's not so unusual for the common people to perform their rituals on ancestors at Buddhist temples, while they are also found at Shinto shrines performing their festivals, community rituals and praying for good fortune. It doesn't bother the followers if they embrace a new religion. Members of some new religions continue to attend their family funeral program at Buddhist temples or at Shinto shrines for annual festival like New Year's "first shrine visit" (Reader, 1988). There were also independent groups relying on none to exist. In 1876, Kurozumikyo earned its official recognition of an independent sect which was inspired by Shinto. In the same way, Misogikyo became an independent group in 1894. Two other sects namely Konkyo and Tenrikyo got the recognition consecutively in 1900 and 1908 (Nobutaka, 2017). In either way, Japan had a freedom of religious expression for their followers irrespective of all religions or ideologies.

⁷ During shrine temple stage, Buddhist temples were usually built at the sites of Shinto shrines. Followers used to believe that Shinto Kami, like human beings, needs buddhas' salvation. This was more like Buddhism assimilating with Shinto and the case was not always from Buddhism. There was also idea of protecting Buddhist temples by summoning Shinto Kami. Shinto-Buddhist syncretism has many such examples where they depend or coincide each other (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 28).

Evaluation of the Newness of Japanese New Religions

New religions in Japan can be called “new religions”, “new movements”, “new religious movements”, “newly arisen religions”, “new new-religion”, etc. but all fall under the newness of religion for sure. Above mentioned discussion clarified quite a number of factors for this title. Sometime, it is about the time frame of originations, necessity of being registered under any organization, increasing amount of number attracting Japanese attention, inspiration from existing religions, providing incentives for earthly benefits or the charisma of particular founder. But all have their distinctive way of principle for moral lives which gave Japanese to live a satisfied life. New movements are found to be very interesting as they gained people’s attention and acceptance. Besides, they managed to raise some healthy competition by introducing lacking regarding the existing faith systems in Japan (Nobutaka, 2017). Authentication of new religions got support from the government through forming several rules and regulation regarding the active participation of the followers. At the beginning of 19th century Japan, sectarian Shinto had a lot of influence on new movements which was developed in a different way. The influences, sometimes, shifted to Buddhism, both Shinto and Buddhism or to traditional roots. But new religions were always in search of a registered organizational set up. Under the Ministry of Culture in Japan, four lineages were formed: “Buddhist-lineage”, “Shinto-lineage”, “Christian” and “other”. Therefore, new religions got a distinctive position from other religions. In the same way, freedom of religious practices was offered to new movements by promulgating the “Religious Corporations Ordinance” in 1946 and by the “Religious Juridical Persons Law” in 1951. In 1951, “*Shinshuren*” or the “Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan” was also formed. These sorts of organizations basically implemented the diversified and distinct position of newly risen religions. The concept of quasi-religions also provided a new flavor to these movements. In 1899, the ordinance called “Reporting Regulations Regarding the Establishment, Transferral, and Discontinuance of Ministers and Facilities of Worship and Teaching for Religions other than Shinto and Buddhism” was issued for the regulation of religions which also provided the title of quasi-religions and in 1940 the formation of “religious organizations” recognized the Shinto, Buddhism and Christian churches distinct from other religions. Thus, new religions got a different title than the existing faiths in Japan. Eventually, “*Shinshukyo*” (new religions) was developed into “*shin Shinshukyo*” (“new” new religions) by Nishiyama Shigeru in the late 1970s.

Besides, the new movements were also strong enough considering their doctrines and principles. They managed to reach peoples’ heart by meeting necessary solution of on-going problems. The founders knew that Japanese people are so

inclined to their traditional culture and they introduced new faiths trusting the traditionalism. As a result, a connection between earthly life and spirituality was established. Power of healing and solution of everyday lives were two broad areas of peoples' attention where the new religions were successful enough. For example, the concept of holy water was very crucial to cure diseases in many cases where other religious treatments failed to solve. Belief in *ji no myoho* also showed an impressive dimension of the new religions for the new adherents. People started to consider those as miraculous acts rooted in new religions. Incentives were always there in support of the movements but the title was more inclined with the time frame. Different opinions regarding the time period of new religious movements are drawn from different scholarly understanding. One thing is very clear, that the movement was initiated at the beginning of 19th century and got its strong hold especially after the Second World War. These last two centuries are actually the period for the concerned movements in Japan. "New religions" is basically a frame to hold some movements under same category and time doesn't really matter with the feature of "new" at all. Tenrikyo, for instance, a 19th century new religious movement still holds the new category although passed more than hundred years in Japan (Barker, 2004; Bromley, 2004; Melton, 2004). More importantly, the title holds the distinct ideological consideration from Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam or any other establishments in Japan.

Conclusion

Considering the rise of new religions, some facts like assimilation, doctrinal contradiction, survival aspects, confluence or confrontation are natural to take part. Japanese religious title of "new" met its sociological, religious, periodic and doctrinal considerations to put forward the additional designation. Japanese traditional culture along with the existing religions like Shinto and Buddhism is a powerful tool for the survival or any new establishment. New religions, here, didn't attack the previous faiths rather tried to show a peaceful coexistence with them. They have a very strong doctrinal set up which won the heart of Japan and brought the new dimension to peoples' lives. The adaptive nature of the people made the way easier for the different religious systems to rise and develop. It is too facile to limit the concept of "new religions" because of their immediate appearances but the ideologies which attracted the followers besides the influential religions like Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam and other. Therefore, one thing is very easy to say that the religions originated during the last two centuries with new principles in Japan are called "new religions", "newly arisen religions" or "new religious movements".

References:

- American Psychological Association Referencing Style Guide. NSW, Australia: Western Sydney University. Retrieved on 1st November 2019 from https://library.westernsydney.edu.au/main/sites/default/files/pdf/cite_APA.pdf.
- Barker, E. (2004). What Are We Studying? A Sociological Case for Keeping the 'Nova.' *Nova Religio*, (8), 88-102.
- Boxer, C. R. (1993). *The Christian Century in Japan 1549–1650* (p. 39). Manchester, United Kingdom: Carcanet Press Limited.
- Bromley, D. (2004). Whither New Religious Studies: Defining and Shaping a New Area of Study. *Nova Religio*, (8), 83-97.
- Cobbold, G. A. (2009). *Religion in Japan* (pp. 9-36). New York: E. S. Gorham. Retrieved on 2nd January 2020 from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28598/28598-pdf.pdf>.
- Davis, W. (1980). *Dojo: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan* (p. 37). Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Earhart, H. B. (September, 1969). The Interpretations of the "New Religions" of Japan as Historical Phenomena. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 37(3), 237-48.
- Earhart, H. B. (1969). *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity* (pp. 69-98). Belmont, California.
- Earhart, H. B. (1974). The Interpretations of the "New Religions" of Japan as New Religious Movements. *Religious Ferment in Asia* (pp. 171-73). Miller, R. J. Lawrence, Kansas: University press of Kansas.
- Earhart, H. B. (1989). Mount Fuji and Shugendo. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 16(2-3), 206-207.
- Ellwood, R. S., & Pilgrim, R. B. (1985). *Japanese Religion: A Cultural Perspective* (pp. 146-147). New Jersey, USA: Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs.
- Hardacre, H. (1986). *Kurozumikyô and the New Religions of Japan* (pp. 3-36). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hirano, T. (1997). Shinto-sekai no gaien to kozo: Shinto-kenkyusha to shintoshu no tameno sagyokasetsuteki-teigi no teisho (The courtyard and structure of Shinto World: Toward a provisional working definition for the purposes of Shinto research and practice). *Shinto shukyo. Journal of Shinto Studies*, 57.

- Huang, Y. (30 January 2017). The methods of propagation of a Japanese new religion in the UK. *Cogent Social Sciences*,(3), 2.
- Jorgensen, M., & Phillips, L. (2002). *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*(p. 28). London: Sage.
- Matsunami, R. K. (Ed.), (2004). *A Guide to Japanese Buddhism*(pp. 1-20). (Edited by Minato-ku), Tokyo, Japan: Hara Publishing. Retrieved on 12th December 2019 from http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/guidejapanbuddhismbm6.pdf.
- McFarland, H. N. (1967). *The Rush Hour of the Gods: A Study of New Religious Movements in Japan*. New York: Macmillan.
- Melton, J. G. (2004). Towards a Definition of 'New Religion'. *Nova Religio*,(8), 73-87. Mihuta, M. I., & Daniel, D. L. (2012). First oil shock impact on the Japanese economy.
- Procedia Economics and Finance*, 3, 1042-1048, Retrieved on 12th December 2019 from www.sciencedirect.com.
- Nobutaka, I. (2017). *Japanese New Religions in the Age of Mass Media*.(Translated by Norman Havens and Carl Freire, pp. 11-117), Tokyo, Japan: Kokugakuin University.
- Reader, I. (1988). The 'New' New Religions of Japan: An Analysis of the Rise of Agonshu. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*,(15), 235-61.
- Reader, I. (1988). *Japanese New Religions: An Overview*(pp. 3-15). Retrieved on 24th December 2019 from [http://www.wrldrels.org/SpecialProjects/JapaneseNewReligions/Japanese%20New %20Religions.WRSP.pdf](http://www.wrldrels.org/SpecialProjects/JapaneseNewReligions/Japanese%20New%20Religions.WRSP.pdf).
- Reid, D. (1991). *New Wine: The Cultural Shaping of Japanese Christianity*(p. 13). Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press.
- Saki, A., & Oguchi, I. (1957). *Soka Gakkai*(p. 28). Tokyo, Japan: Aoki Shoten.
- Sansom, G. B. (1978). *Japan: A Short Cultural History*(p. 350). Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Shigeru, N. (Ed.). (1986). *Shin shinshūkyō no shutsugen*(pp. 198-204). in *Shūkyō: Riidingsu Nihon no shakaigaku*, vol. 19, edited by Miyake Hitoshi et al. Tokyo, Japan: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai.
- Staemmler, B., & Dehn, U. (Eds.) (2011). *Establishing the Revolutionary: An Introduction to New Religions in Japan*(p. 05). Berlin, Germany: Lit-Verlag.
- Stearns, P. N. (2008). *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World*. (Edited), London, England: Oxford University Press, 01. Retrieved on 25th January 2020 from <https://international.uiowa.edu/sites/international.uiowa>.

edu/files/file_uploads/japan_in_tokugawa_period_and_modernity.pdf.

Stone, J. (1994). Rebuking the Enemies of the Lotus: Nichirenist Exclusivism in Historical Perspective. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 21(2-3), 231-259. Retrieved on 3rd February 2020 from <https://www.princeton.edu/~jstone/Articles%20on%20the%20Lotus%20Sutra%20Tendai%20and%20Nichiren%20Buddhism/Rebuking%20the%20Enemies%20of%20the%20Lotus%20-%20Nichirenist%20Exclusivism%20in.pdf>.

Stravelen, H. V., & Offner, C. B. (1963). *Modern Japanese Religions* (p. 23). Tokyo, Japan: Rupert Enderle.

