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OUACHITA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

A STUDY OF ON THE JAPANESE TRADITION OF TENRIKYO

WORLD RELIGIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Someone who visits Japan today, even for a short amount of time, will most likely feel caught in a tug-of-war between complacency and crisis. The list of crisis is most likely familiar to those who stay up to date with world news: Japan's economy is eroding which is threatening the global marketplace. The old political system grew brittle, which, in turn, created a widespread feeling of cynicism. The continuation of globalization has created the expectation of material wealth, which has played a significant part in dissolving many Japanese traditions that people relied on to give them a sense of identity and purpose.¹

But look in any Japanese city today or chat with someone on the street there and there is a broken sense of urgency about all of this. People seem well-fed and content. The trains still run on time, construction sites buzz, and shoppers still jam malls.²

So it is with Japanese traditions of belief, too. Religious institutions have experienced stress. Politics and the Internet are scrambling the role that spirituality had in Japanese life and in many Japanese traditions and various forms of belief, worship no longer provides the sense of community that it once did.³

But although many forms of religious traditions in Japan have seen a slump in recent years and some are viewed with suspicion, one of the traditions that has seen a notable amount of growth is the Japanese tradition of Tenrikyo(meaning "Religion of Divine Wisdom" in Japanese),⁴ which is sometimes referred to as Tenriism.⁵

¹ John McQuaid. "A View of Religion in Japan." JapanSociety.org. U.S.-Japan Foundation Media Fellows Program, 2001. Web., par. 1.

² Ibid., par. 2.

³ Ibid., par. 3.

⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica. "Tenrikyo." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Ed. The Editors of the Encyclopedia of Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d. Web., par. 1.

⁵ WorldAtlas. "Tenriism (Tenrikyo)." *WorldAtlas.com*. WorldAtlas, 25 Aug. 2016. Web., par. 1.

So what draws people to Tenriism? What sets it apart from other religious traditions and how is it similar to other forms of belief? The purpose of this paper is to explore just that. First, their development as a tradition will be reviewed, then the beliefs that are involved in the Tenrikyo tradition, and last, how Tenriistic beliefs impact the lives of people who identify with it will be covered.

DEVELOPMENT: The Foundress, Nakayama Miki

The story about the origins of Tenrikyo can be dated back to October 26, 1838 when it was founded by the foundress Nakayama Miki, or Oyasama as she was, and still is, referred as by followers of Tenrikyo. The official Tenrikyo biography claims that Miki was a holy woman who was born in a farming family who had a great amount of wealth.⁶ A charismatic peasant from modern-day Nara Prefecture (located in the Kansai region of Japan),⁷ Miki was said to have been a very devout Buddhist and that she wished to become a Buddhist nun, but she was instead forced into a marriage with a man, which proved to be very difficult. Miki spread the idea of admirable patience and virtue.⁸ At the age of 40⁹ she claimed that she was possessed by the One god (Tenri-O-no-Mikoto), who demanded her husband that Miki would be given to him as a human shrine of “God the Parent.” Three days passed, and Miki’s husband accepted the proposal. Miki then turned into a shrine of a god through which, Miki claimed, god himself spoke.¹⁰ This happened, she said, after taking part in an exorcism ceremony. During the exorcism she claimed that “God the Parent” spoke through her, saying, “I am God of Origin,

⁶ Stephen Payne. "Nakayama Miki." *TheInfoList.com*. The Info List, 2015. Web., par. 1.

⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica., par. 2.

⁸ Ibid., par.

⁹ Ibid., par.

¹⁰ WorldAtlas., par.

God in Truth. There is causality in this residence. At this time I have descended here to save all humankind. I wish to receive Miki as the Shrine of God.”¹¹

She claimed that its name was Tenri-O-no-Mikoto, but she also referred to it as Tsuki-Hi, meaning “Moon-Sun,” which suggested cosmic unity. After the death of her husband it is said that she had miraculous prophetic and healing powers, which aided her and her daughter, Kokan, in their mission. They chose to live a life of poverty by giving away what they could to those who were less fortunate.¹²

From 1866-1882 Nakayama Miki wrote what she believed to be the revelations of God the Parent, believing that she was, “his mouthpiece and shrine”(Payne). She taught that the good life is one that consists of a large amount of charity and she also designed various spiritual dances. The faith became popular in her lifetime, though she was repeatedly faced with imprisonment from state authority and persecution from various sects of Buddhism, which were criticized by she and her followers as people who were spreading false teachings. In later years Tenrikyo developed stronger ties to Shinto in its teachings. Tenrikyo teaches that Miki still resides in her home which is now in a city called Tenri City, which is also believed by followers of Tenriism to be the point of origin of humanity.¹³

Today, secular interpretations of Nakayama Miki’s life and teachings suggest that she took inspiration from Buddhism, Shinto, and Yamabushi traditions. While Tenrikyo insists that Miki’s teachings were completely original and that her thinking was uniquely inspired, a department of Tenri University is devoted to the secular study of religions in Miki’s era, including Japanese Christianity.¹⁴

¹¹ Payne., par. 2.

¹² Ibid., par. 2-3.

¹³ Ibid., par. 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., par. 5.

DEVELOPMENT: Sacred Texts

As Miki taught Tenrikyo to others, a follower of Tenrikyo, Izo Iburi, claimed to have received a revelation from Tenri and afterward did very much to help spread Tenrikyo. He also worked to compile his and Nakayama's messages into formal texts.¹⁵ These texts became what are called the *Ofudesaki*, the *Mikagura-Uta*, and the *Oshashizu*. These books all contain either songs which regard the words of god that were told through the possession of Nakayama Miki.¹⁶

First is the *Mikagura-Uta*. The *Mikagura-Uta*, meaning "songs for The Service," is the first text that is taught to new members of the faith, and such forms the foundation of Tenrikyo belief. As Tenrikyo followers call her, Oyasama(Nakayama Miki) taught the *Mikagura-Uta* between 1866-1882 and although it is somewhat similar to the *Ofudesaki* because Nakayama Miki wrote it as one of the Tenrikyo holy scriptures, its significance is somewhat different to the *Ofudesaki*. The *Ofudesaki* was written so that, through repeated readings, people could settle God the Parent's intention in their minds without any amount of error. It was also written in order that the people who studied it would not forget it. Rather than providing instruction in the teachings of the *Ofudesaki*, Nakayama's primary purpose for the teachings of the *Mikigura-Uta* to serve as songs for, "The Service," or worship services.¹⁷

The *Mikagura-Uta* can be divided into two main parts. The first of the two parts includes the following three sections: "Sweeping away evils, please save us, Tenri-O-no-Mikoto," and the

¹⁵ Universal Life Church Monastery. "Guide To Divinity | Tenrikyo." *TheMonastery.com*. Universal Life Church Monastery, 29 June 2015. Web., par. 2.

¹⁶ WorldAtlas., par. 2.

¹⁷ Yoshikazu Fukaya. "The Mikagura-uta." *Tenrikyo.or.jp*. Tenrikyo Overseas Department, n.d. Web., par. 1.

sections that begin with, “just a word,” and last, “sweeping away evils, hasten to save us.” These three sections are also songs that are used for morning and evening worship services.¹⁸

The second part of the Mikagura-Uta consist of the songs for the Teodori, the dance with hand movements. It consists of the Eight Verses of the Yorozuyo and the Twelve Songs, which are both composed of songs that count to ten.¹⁹

Common Tenrikyo belief says that Oyasama gave the utmost consideration while composing the Twelve Songs. Because they are in the form of counting songs, they are easy for people to become familiar with them and remember them quite easily. They also present God the Parent’s intention in a clear, understandable manner. In addition, singing and dancing the Teodori in such an extremely joyful manner helps to bring about happiness within them. “However difficult [the] situation may be,” they say, “the joy of faith that allows us to live joyously and spiritedly springs forth from the Mikagura-Uta.”²⁰

Next is the Ofudesaki. The Ofudesaki, meaning, “The Tip of the Writing Brush,” is the sacred text that Oyasama herself took a brush to record God the Parent’s message in. It is made up of seventeen parts with 1,711 *waka*(verses), which, with the exception of two verses, follow a 5-7-5-7-7 syllable pattern.²¹

According to oral accounts of Tenrikyo predecessors, Miki would, “take up a brush whenever God the Parent intended it, even in the darkness of the night, and Her brush would automatically race across the surface of the paper to write the verses.”²²

¹⁸ Ibid., par. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., par. 4.

²⁰ Ibid., par. 5.

²¹ Yoshikazu Fukaya. "The Ofudesaki.," par. 1.

²² Ibid., par. 2.

The Ofudesaki states that the purpose of the world's existence is due to the intention of God the Parent. It says that God the Parent informs us by verses and the tip of Oyasama's writing whenever the human mind is not in sync with the divine intention of Tenri. Along with revealing His divine intention, God the Parent also teaches that out of His parental love and concern for the future of human beings that through the Ofudesaki He has laid out the way that humans should handle our minds. It states that how we should handle our minds is like a path that we should be devoted to.²³

Last is the *Oshashizu*. The *Oshashizu*, meaning, "the Divine Directions," is the longest piece of holy text among the three. It is composed of thirty-three books and 7,790 pages. Instead of poetic language, it offers a more prosaic account of what Tenrikyo is all about. Its main function is to outline the doctrine and philosophies in more literal terms.

BELIEFS

The most basic belief in Tenrikyo is the idea of *kashimono*, meaning, "a thing lent, a thing borrowed." The thing that is being referred to as being lent and borrowed is the human body. Tenrikyo practitioners believe that their minds are under their own control, but their bodies are not entirely under their control. Their belief is that God the Parent controls the body and allows it to continue living. An example that many followers of Tenrikyo use is the idea of breathing. They say that breath is something that requires no effort by us, but, instead, it is a blessing from God the Parent that few realize.²⁴

²³ Ibid., par. 3.

²⁴ Yoshikazu Fukaya. "A Thing Lent, A Thing Borrowed.," par. 1-2.

BELIEFS: God, Sources of Authority, the Human, the Human Problem, and Means to Salvation

Followers of Tenrikyo believe in the single god, Tenri-O-no-Mikoto, to be an entirely benevolent creator, who allows reincarnation but, “encourages the happiness of mankind during their mortal lives.”²⁵ But while they claim to be a monotheistic religious tradition, it is also taught that the universe is the body of God. There are three levels of understanding of God: the *Kami*, being the first level, is a general, every day understanding of God. Next, is *Tsuki-Hi*, which is the understanding that Tenri is the creator of nature and natural laws. Last is *Oya*, meaning parent, which is referred to as the understanding that Tenri is the parent of human beings.²⁶

The figures of authority in tenrikyo consist of God the Parent, Nakayama Miki, Izo Iburi, and the Nakayama family line.²⁷ As mentioned in the previous sections, the other sources of authority are the sacred texts that Nakayama Miki wrote: the Ofudesaki, the Mikagura-Uta, and the Oshashizu.

The human problem in the Tenrikyo world-view is that the mind is covered in a “dust” that clouds its thinking and disallows it from receiving blessings from God the Parent. This “dust” of the mind is gained by wrongdoing and evil and it can be cleansed off through proper service. The term “mental dusts” refer to the Eight Mental Dusts. The official English translation of the Eight Mental Dusts are: Miserliness(the excessive desire to save money), covetousness, anger, self-love, hatred, greed, arrogance, and grudge-bearing. Thus, the human’s job is to counteract this dust by taking part in the method of “sweeping” the “mental dusts” that

²⁵ Universal Life Church Monastery., Par. 3.

²⁶ Stephen Payne. "Tenriism." *TheInfoList.com*. The Info List, 2015. Web., par. 5-6.

²⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica., par. 1.

accumulate in our minds called hinokishin. Hinokishin consists of rejecting the Eight Dusts of the Mind. It also consists of acts of charity, mercy toward other people, and mindfulness.

Through this and the recitation of ritualistic prayers, people can become aware of the “dust of the mind,” allowing the teachings of Tenrikyo to remedy their dusty minds.²⁸ Once that Hinokishin is reached and you continuously practice the various dances, rituals, and prayers that Nakayama Miki outlined in her texts, the type of life that that allows you to live is known as “the Joyous life,” which is a life that is full of blessings from Tenri, which, in turn, grants salvation.²⁹

TENRIISM LIVED OUT

Tenriists have the goal of taking part in Hinokishin, meaning “daily service,” in order to experience the Joyous Life and receive salvation. These spontaneous acts are said to be an expression of joy or gratitude in response to being able to borrow his or her body from God the Parent. Such an action is performed not out of the desire to give the impression of trying to seem selfless to others, but instead out of gratitude for providence from God the Parent without any thought of compensation. Hinokishin can range from a simple smile in order to brighten someone else’s day, to helping out someone in a time of need.³⁰ Because of this goal to help mankind in order to receive salvation, many Tenrikyo followers have been founders of orphanages, disaster relief programs, schools, and hospitals.³¹

Some scholars of religion, like Dr. Barbara Ambros, who is the associate professor of Religions of Asia in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, have noted that the actions that Tenrikyo takes generally goes beyond what other religious traditions are doing, but especially in regard to disaster relief.

²⁸ Payne. "Tenriism.," par. 29.

²⁹ Ibid., par. 5, 25, 27.

³⁰ Payne. "Tenriism.," par. 19.

³¹ Universal Life Church Monastery., Par. 3.

“In the wake natural disasters,” Dr. Ambros said, “religious groups provided relief materials such as water and food as well as temporary shelters. But I believe that [Tenrikyo disaster organizations] are one of the few organizations that have, in a self-sustained manner, helped remove debris and rebuild the infrastructure in disaster-affected regions over an extended period of time.”³² Dr. Ambros’ comment was in response to the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, which caused \$300 billion in damage and left nearly 16,000 dead and 2,500 missing.³³

Not only did members of the Tenrikyo religious tradition offer relief materials, but they went a step further by traveling to devastated areas and conducting large-scale relief activities by using heavy machinery.³⁴

She also noted that practitioners of Tenriism who were a part of the Tenrikyo disaster relief organization conduct emergency drills and communicate with government officials on a regular basis on top of their duties as followers. They do this so that they can promptly engage in potential relief activities. Moreover, Tenrikyo has disaster relief programs not only set up in Japan, but also overseas, which one can conclude from the fact that Tenrikyo puts very much value on disaster relief activities. Dr. Ambros’ finished by saying of Tenrikyo, “[They are] making great contributions to reconstruction efforts by taking advantage of [their] organizing ability and skilled labor. Also, I believe that the members’ dedicated attitudes are bringing a great sense of courage and hope to those affected by the disaster.”³⁵

³² Tenrikyo Online. "A Religious Studies Scholar’s View on Tenrikyo’s Disaster Relief Activities." *Online.Tenrikyo.or.jp*. Tenrikyo Online, 13 Sep. 2011. Web., par. 9.

³³ Becky Oskin. "Japan Earthquake & Tsunami of 2011: Facts and Information." *LiveScience.com*. Purch, 7 May 2015. Web., par. 12.

³⁴ Tenrikyo Online., par. 10.

³⁵ Tenrikyo Online., par. 10, 12.

SUMMARY

Tenrikyo is a Japanese religious tradition that was founded in what is today referred to as Tenri City, in the Nara Prefecture of Japan. It was founded in the late 1830's by Nakayama Miki, who is known by Tenriists as Oyasama. She claimed to be possessed by God, whose full name is Tenri-O-no-Mikoto. She was said to have had miraculous prophetic and healing powers and she spread the ideas of admirable patience and virtue. Soon, one of the followers, Izo Iburi helped to compile Nakayama's teachings and together they put together the three religious texts of Tenrikyo: the Ofudesaki, the Mikagura-Uta, and the Oshashizu. These texts serve as ways in which followers can settle on and remember the intention of God the Parent in their minds, as songs during services, and as bases for the theology and philosophies of the religious tradition.

In Tenrikyo, it is believed that people have dusty minds, which get dusty through the Eight Dusts of the Mind. This dust needs to be cleaned from the brain in order to receive blessings from Tenri. In order to "sweep off" this mental dust followers take part in Hinokishin, which is known as proper service to humankind and Tenri. A critical part of Hinokishin also is to take part in various rituals, like dancing, songs, and the focus on the sacred texts. The last part of Hinokishin is the rejection of the Eight Dusts of the Mind. Once a person accomplishes this, they are said to be given the Joyous Life, which is a life that receives many blessings from Tenri, which, in turn, grants salvation.

Tenriism is mainly lived out mainly by taking part in an aspect of Hinokishin, which is spontaneous acts of kindness toward mankind. This is not something that is to be done in order to seem selfless to others, but instead it is to be done out of gratitude for providence from God

the Parent without any thought of compensation. Because of this, Tenriists are known to be very active in disaster relief and have relief organizations across the globe.

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