Religion, Hybrid Forms, and Cultural Chauvinism in Japan

Ugo Dessì
University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany
ugodessi@uni-leipzig.de

Abstract
This article analyzes a few selected case studies from different religious traditions in contemporary Japan to illustrate, first, the active role played by religion in Japan in the creation of hybrid forms and, secondly, the potentiality in two instances to promote cultural chauvinism. The topics explored here are Japanese Buddhism and the issue of human rights, Shintō’s self-representation as a ‘religion of the forest,’ and Kōfuku no Kagaku’s adoption of Theosophical themes. The discourse of human rights found in traditions such as Jōdo Shinshū, Jōdōshū, and Sōtōshū shows how this western idea is made to resonate with religious concepts from the Buddhist tradition, thus making possible a reshaping of local religious identities. While in this case the catalyst in the process is provided by an external source, the recent reshaping of Shintō as a ‘religion of the forest’ may be characterized as a glocalization leaning to ‘native’ sources, in which the ‘native’ religious tradition is subject to a creative reading following the worldwide growing awareness of ecology. Here a tendency to emphasize the superiority of the ‘native’ culture may also be noticed. However, as the case of Kōfuku no Kagaku’s adoption of various Theosophical themes illustrates, also glocalization leaning to external sources may be accompanied by forms of cultural chauvinism.

Keywords
globalization, hybridization, cultural chauvinism, Japanese Buddhism, Shintō, Kōfuku no Kagaku

1 I would like to thank the editors and an anonymous reviewer for their precious comments. The analyses presented in this article are part of a wider study on Japanese Religions and Globalization yet unpublished.
Introduction

In the late 1980s a new stream of studies focusing on the cultural dimension of globalization started undermining the possibility of equating globalization with westernization and cultural homogenization. Within this context, the thesis that ‘global’ ideas tend to be adapted in distinctive ways in different cultures has been discussed by various scholars, though with different emphases and the choice of different key terms such as glocalization, hybridization, and creolization. Ulf Hannerz has been one of the first voices to articulate the idea that “this world of movement and mixture is a world in creolisation” (Hannerz 1987: 551). Roland Robertson has forcibly argued that “globalization, defined in its most general sense as the compression of the world as a whole,” involves not only “the linking of localities,” but also “the ‘invention’ of locality, in the same general sense of the idea of the invention of tradition” (Robertson 1995: 35). Among other influential scholars, John Tomlinson has emphasized the capacity of non-western cultures “to ‘indigenise’ Western cultural imports” and “appropriate them actively” (Tomlinson 1996: 27), while Jan Nederveen Pieterse has insisted on globalization as “a process of hybridization that gives rise to a global mélange” (Nederveen Pieterse 2009: 65). Based on the aforementioned discussions, it may be argued that globalization produces a variety of local interpretations, and induces shaping of new identities in an attempt to reach some kind of conformity to global standards. Imported ideas acquire a distinctive flavor at the local level, and may in turn be exported as ‘global’ cultural items and exert some influence on other cultures, including the dominant ones.2

The relevance of religion within global cultural flows and in the shaping of glocal identities has been acknowledged in the debate focusing on the creation of hybrid forms within the global context very early, at least since the publication in 1992 of Robertson’s influential volume Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture. Here, in a full chapter dedicated to “Japanese Globality and Japanese Religion,” it is claimed that a few selected internal features of Japanese society related to religion (inclination toward syncretism,

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2 Cf., for example, also Friedman (1990), Kraidy (1999), Beck (2002), and Roudometof (2005).
institutionalized polytheism, and emphasis on purification) greatly affect Japan’s peculiar form of global involvement, and help explain its

very long and successful history of selective incorporation and syncretization of ideas from other cultures in such a way as to particularize the universal, and, so to say, return the product of that process to the world as a uniquely Japanese contribution to the universal (Robertson 1992: 102).

Indeed, also Robertson’s aforementioned suggestion that there is a parallel between “the invention of locality” that accompanies modern cultural flows and “the invention of tradition” (Robertson 1995: 35) postulated by Eric Hobsbawn seems to find meaningful application in the Japanese context. One may think only of the history of modern Japan after the Meiji Restoration (1868), when the rapid and massive assimilation of foreign cultural elements and the modernization of the country were accompanied by the emergence of ‘invented traditions’ such as State Shintō and the modernist pattern of Buddhism centered on ‘experience’ and purified from ‘superstitions.’

These religious hybrid forms emerging during an earlier phase of globalization also speak of the proximity, already emphasized by Hobsbawn, of the phenomenon of invented traditions to nationalism (cf. Hobsbawn 1983: 13).

We should expect that the recent increase in material and cultural global exchanges and the unprecedented intensity, pervasiveness, and rapidity of global dynamics also affect the shaping of new religious identities. In the following, a few selected case studies from different religious traditions in contemporary Japan are analyzed, namely, Japanese Buddhism and the issue of human rights, Shintō’s self-representation as a ‘religion of the forest,’ and Kōfuku no Kagaku’s adoption of Theosophical themes, which show the active role played by religion in the creation of hybrid forms. These examples also show that, despite a certain tendency to incorporate elements of cultural chauvinism, the glocalization of religion in contemporary Japan needs not necessarily follow this pattern.

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Japanese Buddhism and the Discourse on Human Rights

Although ideas supporting the equality and dignity of human beings may also be found in different cultures worldwide, it is apparent that the concept of human rights in its everyday use in global communication is almost invariably related to the cultural experience of the so-called western countries and to the legacy of European Enlightenment. This also applies to the case of Japan, where the idea of “human rights” (jinken 人権) occupies a central place in the 1947 Constitution developed from a draft prepared by the occupying American army (Neary 2002: 18). In the postwar Japanese cultural milieu, the issue of human rights has come to overlap considerably with the issue of the discrimination against the hisabetsu buraku (discriminated-against hamlet people) (Neary 2002: 36), a marginalized minority of Japanese people popularly associated with ideas of pollution and karma, whose historical formation traces back to medieval Japan and especially to discriminatory policies enforced during the Edo period (Amstutz 2010). Not only is this minority the object of discriminatory practices (anonymous graffiti, name lists, harassment, etc.), but surveys conducted in local temples and denunciations by human rights organizations have shown that Japanese religious institutions have also substantially contributed to the problem (for example, through derogatory language, discriminatory necrologies and posthumous names) (Kitaguchi 1999; Bodiford 1996).

The organization most obviously associated with the denunciation of these discriminatory practices and lobbying on behalf of the hisabetsu buraku is the powerful Buraku Kaihō Dōmei (Buraku Liberation League), formally started in 1955 as the postwar continuation of the Zenkoku Suiheisha (National Levelers' Association) founded in 1922 by Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 members especially inspired by Marxist, socialist and Christian ideas (Totten and Wagatsuma 1972: 42; Neary 1989: 9).

Since the majority of hisabetsu buraku were traditionally associated with Jōdo Shinshū, increasing criticism coming from groups such as the Suiheisha stimulated religious institutions to promote measures to counter internal discrimination. After the first attempts in the 1920s, the postwar years saw the emergence within both major branches of Jōdo Shinshū of reform movements inspired by the idea of religious equality—dōbō 同朋 (fellow companions)—tracing back to the founder Shinran 親鸞 (1173-1262), which were also deeply interrelated with the hisabetsu buraku issue (Heidegger
2006: 285-292; 2010). Within the Honganji branch (Honganji-ha 本願寺派), these movements merged in 1978 to form the Kikan Undō 基幹運動 (Central Movement), which is, together with the Dōwa Kyōiku Shinkōkai 同和教育振興会 (Association for the Promotion of Dōwa Education),4 the center for the promotion of human rights and anti-discrimination activities. In the Kikan Undō’s official program, protecting “human rights” (jinken) is presented as one of the main issues, and is made to resonate with selected religious ideas such as those attributed to the founder Shinran emphasizing “the sanctity of life and an equalitarian outlook” (inochi no songen to byōdōkan いのちの尊厳と平等観) (Kikan Undō Honbu Jimukyoku 2001: 81-82). At present, the full acceptance of the discourse on human rights within the Honganji-ha and its hybridization with the religious idea of dōbō 殿様 may be easily seen in various official statements and documents, included the head priest’s claim that the fundamental premise for the realization of “a society of fellow companions” (on-dōbō no shakai 御同朋の社会) is not only “religious teachings” (mi-oshie み教え) but also “respect for life” (seimei sonchō 生命尊重) and “protection of human rights” (jinken yōgo 人権擁護) (Jōdo Shinshū Honganji-ha 1999, 2001; Kikan Undō Honbu Jimukyoku 2001: 8). In the other major branch of Jōdo Shinshū, the Ōtani-ha 大谷派, the reform movement Dōbōkai Undō 同朋会運動 (Fellow Companions’ Movement) created in 1962 is, similarly to the Kikan Undō, concerned with human rights issues especially through the Kaihō Undō Suishin Honbu 解放運動推進本部 (Head Office for the Promotion of the Liberation Movement), originally founded in 1977 as a further attempt to cope with the hisabetsu buraku 他的・別格差別 issue. Among other things, during the Human Rights Week commemorating the adoption by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10, 1948), the Kaihō Undō Suishin Honbu organizes an annual Exhibition on Human Rights (jinken shūkan gyararī ten 人権週間ギャラリー展) in the facilities of the head temple in Kyoto. During the same period, a parallel exhibition on human rights (Jinken paneru ten 人権パネル展) is held in the facilities of the Nishi Honzanji in Kyoto, the head temple of the Honganji-ha. While the incorporation of the idea (and practice) of human rights within postwar Jōdo Shinshū

4 The term dōwa 同和 (social integration) refers to the hisabetsu buraku issue especially in administrative language.
reform movements has been gradual and not without contradictions, starting in the 1980s it has also found application in other areas, such as gender issues and the discrimination suffered by former Hansen's disease patients (Heidegger 2006, 2010; Dessì 2007: 172-182).

Apart from Jōdo Shinshū, the hisabetsu buraku issue enjoys a certain centrality in religious communication concerning human rights within Japanese Buddhism. A decisive turn in the extensive glocalization of these ideas took place in the early 1980s, following the so-called Machida Incident. During the Third World Conference on Religion and Peace held in Princeton in 1979, the Japanese delegate and then chief administrator of Sōtōshū 曹洞宗 (and concurrently president of the Japan Buddhist Federation) Machida Muneo 町田宗夫 denied the presence in Japan of any kind of discrimination against minorities, hisabetsu buraku included, and successfully lobbied such that no mention was made of these problems in a final report. Machida’s attempt to protect Japan from external criticism was harshly criticized by Japanese human rights activists, and a campaign promoted by the Buraku Kaihō Dōmei followed, during which he was denounced and interrogated with other religious leaders of Sōtōshū in a series of assemblies (Bodiford 1996: 1-4). When a few years later Machida was led by this pressing campaign and increasing debate within the denomination to apologize for his discriminatory attitude, Sōtōshū had already started in 1982 the Division for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights (Jinken Yōgo Suishin Honbu 人権擁護推進本部). Ever since, this division has been committed to activities such as organizing conferences, publishing books and booklets on human rights, and eliminating discriminatory necrologies (Bodiford 1996: 5-6, 10). It is significant that Sōtōshū itself identifies the starting point of its “efforts for the establishment of human rights and the total eradication of discrimination” (jinken kakuritsu, sabetsu kaishō ni mukete no torikumi 人権確立・差別解消に向けての取り組み) in the Machida Incident (‘Sōtōshū Danshinto Hikkei’ Kaitei Iinkai 2008: 128). These ideas have come to be consistently incorporated in Sōtōshū religious communication, and figure prominently in the denominational slogan “human rights, peace, environment” (jinken, heiwa, kankyō 人権・平和・環境), where “striving for the protection and implementation of human rights” (jinken no yōgo to kakuritsu ni tsutomemasu 人権の擁護と確立に努めます) is related to the aim of awakening to the teachings of the Buddha and creating a society free of bullying and discrimination (‘Sōtōshū
Danshinto Hikkei’ Kaitei Iinkai 2008: 126; Sōtōshū 2009, 2011a). This trend and the concurrent reshaping of a glocal Sōtōshū identity are very clear in the rationale offered by the institutions for their support of human rights to the religious community:

“Why do Sōtōshū monks and priests take the issue of human rights very seriously?”…The profound meaning of our engagement for the eradication of social discrimination and the enforcement of human rights (jinken 人権) lies in “the teaching of equality” (ningen byōdō 人間平等) inherited from Śākyamuni and our two founders, the revered Dōgen Zenji and Eizan Zenji, who taught us this inherent equality of human beings based on the spirit of wisdom and compassion (chie to jihi no seishin 智慧と慈悲の精神)…Although Buddhism and the idea of human rights are not the same thing, the Buddhist teaching of the equality of human beings and the viewpoint that supports the respect for their dignity have much in common (Sōtōshū 2011b).

The fact that the idea of human rights is explicitly associated here with fundamental Buddhist concepts such as wisdom and compassion confirms how far the process of glocalization has gone. With the formation of this hybrid form leaning to external sources (human rights), the understanding of aspects of the Sōtōshū tradition itself comes to be significantly related to the global context, and to powerful concepts circulating in global cultural flows.

Another consequence of the scandal created by Machida on the international stage of Princeton has been the creation of the ‘Dōwa mondai ni Torikumu Shūkyō Kyōdan Rentai Kaigi 「同和問題にとりくむ宗教教団連带会議’ (Joint Conference of Religions Concerned with the ‘Dōwa Problem’). This interreligious network was formed in 1981 by fifty-three Japanese religious organizations and three umbrella associations, out of the need to accept as an individual task the reflection on “human rights in the world” (sekai no jinken 世界の人権) and “the reality of buraku discrimination in Japan” (Nihon no buraku sabetsu no jijitsu 日本の部落差別の事実) based on “a compassionate attitude” (jiai 慈愛) (Jōdoshū 2006: 278). One of the Buddhist traditions involved in this network is Jōdoshū 浄土宗. In the preface to the first volume of a series on human rights education (jinken kyōiku shirīzu 人権教育シリーズ) published by this denomination, the then Chief Administrator Mizutani Kōshō 水谷幸正 recalls that

In Jōdoshū, many episodes of discrimination have occurred, starting with the bestowing of discriminatory Dharma-names, and the effort to support human rights centered on the experience of the hisabetsu buraku issue still continues, after it was started for
the first time in 1980 with the Conference for Promoting Awareness of the Dōwa Issue (Jōdoshū Dowa Suishin Kyōgikai 浄土宗同和推進協議会) (Jōdoshū 2006: 2).

Mizutani acknowledges that Jōdoshū’s active engagement in the issue of human rights dates back to the aftermath of the Machida Incident, when the first meetings to discuss and counter discrimination were organized. At the same time, he testifies that in the meantime a massive incorporation of this discourse in religious communication had occurred, when, a couple of sentences later, he affirms that human rights education provides the foundations for establishing “the universal culture of ‘human rights’” (‘jinken’ to iu fuhentekina bunka 「人権」という普遍的な文化), which represents in turn “the path toward peace” (heiwa e no michi 平和への道) (Jōdoshū 2006: 3). Moreover, Mizutani explicitly refers to the aim of the United Nations to make the twenty-first century through education “a century of human rights” (jinken no seiki 人権の世紀), adding that global society would be in serious danger if this objective is not seen as a strict necessity (Jōdoshū 2006: 2).

The glocalization of the official discourse on human rights in Jōdoshū was shown to be at an advanced stage already in two important documents issued by the denomination in 2001. One, the Jōdoshū Appeal for Human Rights in the 21st Century (Jōdoshū 21-seiki jinken apīru 浄土宗21世紀人権アピール), has the discourse at the document’s very foundations, and encourages Jōdoshū followers to apply these ideas to all kinds of discrimination and to accept as a mission protecting the freedom and equality of all living beings in accordance with Buddhism and the teaching of the founder Hōnen 法然 (1133-1212), according to whom “all human beings are equal” (bannin byōdō 万人平等) (Jōdoshū 2006: 282-283). The other is the Declaration for the Start of the 21st Century (Jōdoshū 21-seiki ekitō sengen 浄土宗21世紀劈頭宣言), where the idea of human rights is related to Hōnen’s insistence on the necessity of “acknowledging one’s own ignorance” (gusha no jikaku 愚者の自覚), and to the basic Buddhist concept of “co-dependent origination” (engi 緣起) that provides the ground for the idea of “harmonious coexistence” (tomoiki 共生) (Jōdoshū 2006: 278-280). The connection between Hōnen and the protection of human rights is similarly presented

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5 Tomoiki is the central idea in the slogan Hōnen tomoiki chosen by Jōdoshū for the celebrations of Hōnen’s 800th memorial in 2011.
in the more recent Peace Appeal (Jōdoshū heiwa apīru 浄土宗平和アピーール) of 2008, where the realization of one's foolishness is set as the precondition for a deep repentance of past violations of human rights by the religious community (Jōdoshū 2009). Thus, in the case of Jōdoshū it is also possible to see that the discourse on human rights has come to be indigenized in such a way that traditional teachings can speak through forceful external ideas and vice versa, allowing at the same time a reshaping of Jōdoshū religious identity within global society.

Shintō as a ‘Religion of the Forest’

A very common stereotype about the Japanese people is their love and reverence for nature, allegedly deriving from an unspecified spirituality and religious heritage. Since the Japanese themselves decisively contribute to this rhetoric, it is not unexpected to find it within the context of Shintō 神道, the Japanese religion that is perhaps most popularly associated with the natural environment, including mountains, forests, rivers and springs. Although in the following we will specifically refer to the institutional adaptation and use of these ideas, the scope of this rhetoric is by no means limited to Shintō institutions. In fact, the theme of Shintō as a ‘religion of the forest’ may be considered one of the characteristic marks of the nihonjinron 日本人論 discourse on Japanese identity, and notably of one of its manifestations, the nihonkyōron 日本教論 (discourse on Japanese religion). Within this context, the idea that Shintō is a ‘religion of the forest’ has been vigorously affirmed by intellectuals such as Umehara Takeshi and Nakazawa Shin’ichi (Shimazono 1995; Prohl 2004), and finds varied expression in Japanese popular culture, such as in the case of the acclaimed animation movies by Miyazaki Hayao, the creator of Princess Mononoke. As a brief example, for Umehara, who is perhaps the most representative proponent of these ideas, Shintō has nothing to do with prewar nationalism, but “originated as a form of nature worship, rooted in the civilization of the forest.” And, Umehara claims, as a form of Japanese ‘spirituality’ this provides Japan with a crucial resource for developing a new civilization overcoming the European one and its pitfalls (Umehara 1999: 42, 47). In turn, the historical antecedents of this ideology may be traced in formations such as prewar anti-western rhetoric, the
writings of Watsuji Tetsurō, and, much earlier, Kokugaku 国学 (national learning) thought (cf., for example, Rambelli 2001; and Tucker 2003).

The link between institutional Shintō and nature is especially emphasized in a series of undated pamphlets seemingly published by the Jinja Honchō 神社本庁 (Association of Shintō Shrines) in the 1990s, whose contents also feature on its official website. In one of these, entitled “Civilization of the Divine Forest” (Kamigami no mori no bunmei 神々の森の文明), we find the following passage in English:

When we think of the sharp decrease of forests in the world, or of the destruction of the tropical rain forests which have a grave influence for the environment of planet, we can say that it is remarkable that 67 percent of Japan is still covered by forests. This is not only due to the Japanese monsoon climate, or due to its mountainous geography. It is rather due to the influence of Japanese ancient civilization (korai no bunmei 古来の文明) which respected the forest, utilizing it as holy trees as well. This long continuing value system of Japan made it possible to keep the forests as its fruits until now (Jinja Honchō 2009a).

In this text written by the well-known Shintō scholar and priest Sonoda Minoru 菅田稔, the fact that a large part of Japan is still forested is directly related to the persistence of traditional values rooted in “Japanese ancient civilization.” Not surprisingly, this civilization is identified with Shintō, the “religion of the forest” (mori no shūkyō 森の宗教), that “has kept the religious vision of the ancient Japanese until nowadays without changing it very much” (Jinja Honchō 2009a). In another of these pamphlets characterized by a less optimistic tone, the environmental crisis and other pressing problems of modern society are ascribed to “the lack of awesomeness, reverence, and appreciation for nature that ancient people used to have and taught us about” (Jinja Honchō 2009b). However, Shintō is presented as a force able to provide a specific contribution to resolve the environmental crisis, because of its role as the guardian of the “spirit of reverence and gratitude” (ikei to kansha no nen 畏敬と感謝の念) that can be extended from the family circle to other people in the world and the natural environment, and is deemed to provide a valuable clue to face the ecological crisis (Jinja Honchō 2009b). Similar ideas are also found in other informative material produced by Shintō institutions for the public (Jinja Honchō 2009c, n.d.; and Public Affairs Headquarters for Shikinen Sengu 2006).
Although this campaign within Shintō has been developed within the framework of a growing awareness of ecology in Japan and at the global level, the responses to this crisis tend to present Shintō’s concern for nature in a rather ahistorical way. According to this view, the traditional sensibility for the environment traces back to the spirituality and worldview of a native ancient civilization, which has vivified Japanese history until modernity and its excesses, and has been preserved almost in its integrity by Shintō since time immemorial. A closer look at these assumptions about the relationship between Shintō and nature reveals not only that they are rather problematical, but also that they are quite relevant to our discussion on the glocalization of religion in Japan.

The first observation here is that although there is a meaningful connection between Shintō, the kami, rice cultivation and the environment, concern for nature and ecology has hardly found until recently a significant place in the agenda of Shintō institutions (cf. Nelson 1996: 223; Breen 2010). If we look at the history of modern Japan since the Meiji period, Shintō’s primary concern has been with the strong support of the dominant official ideology centered on the divinity of the emperor, with the propagation of principles based on the traditional values of loyalty and filial piety, and with the performance of religious rituals. Even after the war, reviving the connection between religion and the state has remained one of the main priorities of the Shintō world, as may be seen in the support for political attempts to nationalize the Yasukuni 靖国 (the shrine in Tokyo that was the center of Japanese militarist ideology during the war) and in the wave of nationalism recently leading to the reinstitution of the National Foundation Day and laws such as those concerning the flag and the national anthem. At the level of religious practice, it has been noted that the most conspicuous activity of Shintō institutions presently consists of distributing amulets from the Grand Shrine of Ise (Ise Jingū 伊勢神宮) to local shrines and households (Breen 2010).

However, even the claim that pre-modern Japanese culture and Shintō were explicitly and reflexively concerned with ecology is far from being unproblematic. To start with, the idea of Japanese people’s traditional oneness with nature is scarcely substantiated. In this regard, it has been observed that “the pre-modern Japanese despoiled forest and field on a grand scale,” that especially in the Edo period “the monumental works of the religious and ruling elite consumed huge quantities of the best timber,”
and that progressive reforestation policies were implemented from the mid-seventeenth century onwards (Howard 1999: 422). From the historical point of view, what emerges is the image of a society that “passes through cycles in terms of relative emphasis in forest use,” oscillating between “production” and “spatial and spiritual domination,” rather than of one exclusively concerned with protecting the environment (Howard 1999: 423). However, not only may the religious institutions have strongly contributed to the past exploitation of Japanese forests but also many elements of popular discourses on the sacredness of trees might not date back to a primordial time as an originally Japanese phenomenon, as many authors believe. On the contrary, pre-medieval ideas on the sacredness of trees were often borrowings from Chinese and other continental cultures that were subsequently adapted to native perspectives (Rambelli 2001: 48).

In Fabio Rambelli’s deconstruction of this modern cultural myth, these “ecopietas-like attitudes” are also shown to be “the result of struggles and negotiations between Buddhist institutions supported by the state and local social structures or life-styles” (Rambelli 2001: 4). In other words, the Shintō view of nature and trees as sacred may have been strongly influenced not only by foreign cultural imports (e.g., the Buddhist belief that the buddha-nature is present in all things) but also, and in a decisive way, by the politics of power of the religious institutions and by their attempt to sacralize the very material with which they were building their temples and shrines (Rambelli 2001: 43-59).

Given this background, it is tempting to see the recent attention shown by Shintō institutions to the issue of ecology as not only the continuation of a ‘traditional’ rhetoric but also, and crucially to our discussion, a specific way of adapting to global trends. The response given by Shintō to the growing global awareness of an impending environmental crisis is modulated through a selective approach to the tradition, which emphasizes the allegedly immemorial and respectful attitude of Japanese people towards a ‘divine’ nature. In this way, by looking to the distant and ‘imagined’ past, a new identity is shaped that may meet the growing expectations of global society.
Kōfuku no Kagaku, Mahatmas, and Lost Continents

The term Mu was introduced in the 1860s by the antiquarian Brasseur de Bourbourg as indicating the ‘Mayan’ name for the mythic continent of Atlantis (Ramaswamy 2005: 74). The theme of this and other lost continents was later developed in the writings of Rosicrucians and Theosophists, where for example it is an integral part of the theory of ‘root-races’ already sketched in 1883 by Alfred P. Sinnett (1840-1921) (Santucci 2008: 41). According to this view incorporating a number of religious sources and later expanded by Helena P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) and others, humanity develops through a series of ‘rounds’ or planetary cycles with which seven ‘root-races’ and further sub-races are associated. The ‘root-race’ of the current age is the fifth, the Aryan Race, which will be followed by a sixth root-race characterized by the re-emerging of occult powers (already developing in America), and by a seventh root-race, the full development of human spirituality (Santucci 2008: 43-50). The Aryan Race, however, was preceded by the Atlantean Race, and earlier by the third race that inhabited the continent of Lemuria (reaching Madagascar, Sri Lanka, and Sumatra). The latter continent has been popularly identified with Mu at least since the time of the publication in 1931 of *Lemuria: The Lost Continent of the Pacific* by the Rosicrucian Wishar S. Cervé (1883-1939).6

Winston Davis has illustrated how the adaptation of the myth of the lost continent of Mu by the Japanese new religious movement Mahikari 真光 (where the Japanese become the original inhabitants of the lost continent) was functional to founder Ōkada Yoshikazu’s 岡田良一 (1901-1974) aim to “remythologize Japan’s history” and “giving his own followers the dominant place in the unfolding plot of the universe.” According to Davis, the main source of Okada’s information on the lost continent of Mu was the work of James Churchward (1851-1936), who popularized this topic in a series of books (Davis 1980: 80, 82).

More recently, the incorporation of the myth of the lost continents and other Theosophical themes may be seen in another new religious movement, Kōfuku no Kagaku 幸福の科学 (Happy Science). The teachings of this new religious movement founded in 1986 by Ōkawa Ryūhō 大川隆法

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6 See Ramaswamy (2005: 73-74). For the earlier origins of the concept of Lemuria in evolutionary thought and in the work of Philip Sclater (1829-1913), see Santucci (2008: 61), and Ramaswamy (2005: 21).
(b. 1956) are based on the idea of a spiritual world including different realms, and of a multitude of eternal spirits that progress through repeated reincarnations on Earth. While similar views had been previously presented by Takahashi Shinji 高橋信次 (1927-1976), the founder of GLA (God Light Association), they may also be seen as an updated version of basic Buddhist ideas concerning the cycle of rebirths and the afterlife, and other folk religious beliefs related to spirit possession and guardian spirits. In Kōfuku no Kagaku, these ‘native’ religious elements are blended with other sources, among which the role of ideas elaborated within Theosophy seems quite significant.

To start with, the way Ōkawa develops his cosmogony concerning the planetary consciousnesses of the tenth dimension and those of the upper dimensions is at least reminiscent of Blavatsky’s conception of planetary chains and cycles. More striking is the similarity of the Theosophical idea of the Mahatmas, the perfected beings who direct the spiritual evolution of human beings, with the saviors or dai nyorai 大如来 (Grand Nyorai) who populate the ninth dimension of Ōkawa’s multidimensional world. These dai nyorai “provide the principles upon which any human civilization is based (bunmei no genri 文明の原理)” (Ōkawa 1997b: 249-250), and the Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, and Moses, who are identified within Theosophy, together with many other historical figures, as Mahatmas, are included among them. Even more interestingly, the two central Mahatmas in the Theosophical tradition have been incorporated in Kōfuku no Kagaku. These are Koot Hoomi and Morya, the two figures who allegedly inspired Sinnett and Blavatsky through their letters (cf. Santucci 2008; Campbell 1980: 56-57). For Ōkawa, Mōriya モーリヤ (Moria) is actually just another name for Moses (Ōkawa 1997a: 234). In the case of the most prominent Mahatma found in Theosophy, Koot Hoomi, Ōkawa himself reveals the connection with his own religious thought. In his account of the origins of

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9 See Ōkawa (1997a: 234). Cf. Campbell (1980: 54), and Takahashi (1995: 245). The dai nyorai are Shaka 釈迦 (Śākyamuni), Iesu Kirisuto イエス・キリスト (Jesus Christ), Kōshi 孔子 (Confucius), Manu マヌ, Maitorēyā マイトレーヤー (Maitreya), Nyūton ニュートン (Newton), Zeusu ゼウス (Zeus), Zoroasutā ゾロアスター (Zoroaster), Mōse モーセ (Moses) and Enriru エンリル (Enlil) (Ōkawa 1997a: 234).
human life on Earth, Ōkawa narrates how 270 million years ago a multitude of people coming from the Magellanic Clouds landed on our planet following the plan by Eru Kantāre エル・カンターレ (El Cantare)—the highest spiritual being in Kōfuku no Kagaku—to populate the Earth. On that occasion, also the spirit of Kaitoron カイトロン (Kaitron), “known in Theosophy (shinchigaku 神智学) as Kūto Fūmī クート・フーミー” (Koot Hoomi), who was “primarily in charge of science and technology,” and was later known as Arukimedesu アルキメデス (Archimedes), and Newton, appeared on Earth (Ōkawa 1997a: 60-61).

As in the case of Mahikari, in Kōfuku no Kagaku the theme of lost lands has been incorporated in the fundamental teachings. In this reconstruction of the narrative, the succession from Mū ムー (Mu) to Atorantisu アトランティス (Atlantis) is maintained. In contrast to Blavastky’s evolutionary outlook, however, Mū is distinguished from Ramudia ラムディア (Lemuria) and preceded by it. The continent of Mū, a former colony of Ramudia, is located by Ōkawa in present-day Indonesia, and is presented as the site of a highly developed civilization based on the energy of light. This civilization specifically flourished out of the personal involvement of Eru Kantāre, who first incarnated as the mythical emperor of Mū, Ra Mū ラ・ムー (La Mu), and later on also as the Buddha Śākyamuni (Ōkawa 1997a: 261-264). Before Mū disappeared beneath the ocean about 15,000 years ago, some Muvians were able to escape, thus reaching East Asia (Vietnam, Japan, and China), the Andes, and later spreading as far as the Atlantic Ocean. Here, they were instrumental in developing the Atlantean civilization under the spiritual guidance of Kūto Fūmī (Ōkawa 1997a: 269). Atoantisu even surpassed Mū technologically, but due to the prevalence of materialism, inexorable decay followed, and the continent was partially submerged by the ocean. From this center, civilization spread to various regions, such as South America, Greece, and the Middle East (Ōkawa 1997a: 270-271). Ōkawa’s providential plan is thus characterized by the rising and falling of civilizations, to any of which Eru Kantāre provides a guiding spirit assisting

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10 The seven incarnations of Eru Kantāre are: 1) Ra Mū ラ・ムー (La Mu); 2) Tosu トス (Thoth); 3) Riento Āru Kuraudo リエント・アール・クラウド (Rient Arl Croud); 4) Ofearisu オフェアリス (Ophealis); 5) Herumesu ヘルメス (Hermes); 6) Gōtama Shiddārta ゴータマ・シッダールタ (Gautama Siddhartha); and 7) Ōkawa Ryūhō 大川 隆法 (Ōkawa 1997a: 359).
to its development until the peak is reached and dark energy causes some full-scale natural disaster. This is also the case of our present civilization, which is destined, because of the excessive emphasis on technology and materialism, for a rapid decline and disappearance (Ōkawa 1997a: 274-275). Interestingly enough for our discourse, Japan is going to play a central role within this plan:

In the twenty-first century, after many decades of confusion humanity will create a new civilization out of its own ruins, which will spread out from the Asian region (Ajia no chi アジアの地). Originating from Japan (Nihon kara 日本から), it will reach East Asia, Indonesia, and then Oceania. Some of the existing continents will sink in due course into the ocean, and a new continent of Mū will emerge (mata atarashiki Mū tairiku ga fujō shite また新しきムー大陸が浮上して) and become the area of a great civilization… However, the precondition for the emergence of these future civilizations is that from now on we who are living here in Japan let the sun of the truth of Buddhist law (Buppō shinri no taiyō 仏法真理の太陽) arise. While the world will sink in darkness, Japan will shine as the sun (Nihon ga, taiyō to natte kagayaku 日本が、太陽となって輝く). The fact that you have been born in Japan in this specific age means that you are part of an important mission (Ōkawa 1997a: 289-291).

Thus, it may be seen that in Ōkawa’s reconstruction of the myth of Mu the adoption of foreign cultural elements serves at the same time the purpose of shaping a new glocal identity and strongly emphasizing the importance of Japan and Japanese culture. The founder Ōkawa presents himself as the last of the incarnations of the Eternal Buddha, Eru Kantāre, who first manifested himself on Earth through the mythical emperor of the continent of Mū. In addition, the fact that the Muvian culture was transmitted to Japan by the refugees who escaped the continent before its final destruction also seems to imply an added value. Thus, it emerges quite clearly how within the context of Ōkawa’s cosmic vision postulating the progressive development of humankind’s spiritual perfection, the creation of hybrid religious forms dependent on foreign sources may be functional to the claim of superiority of Japanese culture over other cultures.11

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Conclusion

From the cases illustrated above it is apparent that also in Japan the impact of global cultural flows and growing expectations to conform to global standards may produce a variety of local interpretations and religious hybrid forms. At the most general level, it is possible to distinguish here between two main types of glocalization, depending on the cultural or religious source that acts as a catalyst in the process. The incorporation of the discourse of human rights in religious communication found in traditions such as Jōdo Shinshū, Jōdoshū, and Sōtōshū may be characterized as a glocalization leaning to external sources. Indeed, within this context it is noticeable how the idea of human rights basically originating in European culture is made to resonate with religious concepts from the Buddhist tradition such as those of “fellow companions,” “wisdom and compassion,” “the equality of all human beings,” “co-dependent origination,” and the related notion of “harmonious coexistence.” As a result of these selective processes, the religious tradition is increasingly related to the global context and to powerful global ideas, and the creation of local religious identities becomes possible. On the other hand, the recent reshaping of Shintō as a ‘religion of the forest’ may be characterized as a glocalization leaning to ‘native’ sources. Here, the ‘native’ religious tradition is subject to a creative reading, and, following the worldwide growing awareness of ecology, a new identity is shaped that might meet the growing expectations of global society. As in the case of Hobsbawn’s invented traditions and Meiji-period religious hybrids belonging to the constellation of State Shintō and Buddhist modernism, also in Shintō as a ‘religion of the forest’ a clear tendency to emphasize the superiority of the ‘native’ culture may be noticed. The combination of cultural chauvinism and glocalization is however not limited to instances where the local tradition plays a key role. In the aforementioned case of the discourse on human rights within Japanese Buddhism this link is not evident. However, Kōfuku no Kagaku’s adoption of Theosophical themes and the centrality of Japan in Ōkawa's providential plan clearly show how also the adaptation of external sources may serve for religion in Japan the scope to carve out a special role for itself and the local culture within global society.
References


