

Report from a research on the 'intellectual *ikai*' of contemporary Japan

Starting with the ghosts and their world



The

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kuchisake onna (口さけ女), a young attractive female apparition, was probably the ghost that led the debut of the spirits' new renaissance in Japan. The Lady with the Horror Smile was first spotted in May, 1979, as was soon documented by Miyata Noboru in his book *Yōkai no minzokugaku. Nihon no mienai kûkan* (Anthropology of the Supernatural: Japan's Invisible Realm) (Miyata 1985: 21).

The 1980s were definitely the decade of the ghosts. The indicator for this was the appearance of a new term, *ikai* (異界). The word does not appear in any representative dictionary, but is widely used in numerous writings on folklore issues, which themselves had a significant revival in the 1980s. In 1992, the sociologist Kadowaki Atsushi published a study under the title *Kodomo to wakamono no ikai* (The Other World of children and adolescents). Kadowaki admits that he does not actually know the source of the term he uses in such a prominent place. He remarks that recently a number of cultural anthropologists and 'younger folklorists' seem to be fond of it (p. i-ii). The term *ikai* literally translates as 'other, strange, alien world,' but it would also be possible to render it as underworld, occult world, ghost world, magic world, counterworld, liminal/marginal world or twilight zone. In part, the term corresponds to other

Japanese concepts of the world beyond, for example, *takai* (他界), *meido* (冥途), and *tokoyo no kuni* (常世の国). However, *ikai* stands for more than the older versions of a Japanese "beyond". It has to be placed within the framework of modernity criticism; moreover, it implies an extensive discussion of Japanese culture and society. *Ikai* is a talisman word, one of those markers of public discussion that convey a certain context, easily imagined by any well-informed person, and so applied without being given a concise definition.¹

From popular ghosts to 'academic ghosts'

The focus on the *ikai* associated with popular culture is usually located in the metropolis. Here, the desire for the weird and wonderful (*fushigi* 不思議) and a fascination for the world of darkness (*yami no sekai* 闇の世界) are said to be enhanced by the alienating surroundings and the entertainment industry. Miyata Noboru's *toshi minzokugaku* (folklore of the city) deals with such issues. An important aspect of the weird in the cities are *uwasa*, rumours, and *kawai* or *fushigi na hanashi* (frightening or strange stories). Worth mentioning is the book *Kowai uwasa, fushigi na hanashi* (Frightening rumours, weird tales) edited by Tsunemitsu Tôru (常光徹) and Matsutani Miyoko (松谷みよ子). Both are affiliated with the Nihon Minwa no Kai (Society for Japanese Folk Tales) and the Fushigi no Sekai o Kangaeru Kai (Society for Thinking About the World of the Wonderful and Weird). They are collectors of the so-called modern urban legends (現代都市伝説 *gendai toshi densetsu*), a genre of contemporary folklore research that has first become popular in America (J.H. Brunvand). The trend is mirrored in the works of the German scholar Rolf Wilhelm Brednich (University of Göttingen) whose collection *Die Spinne in der Yucca-Palme* (The spider in the Yucca-palm) had a tremendous success in Germany, and via the translations of 1992 and 1993 had also quite an impact in Japan. Both of the above mentioned Japanese folklorists have published a volume with collected *gakko no kaidan* (学校の怪談 spooky school tales).

The *gakko no kaidan* with their inventory of monsters appearing in school toilets such as *toire no Hanaka-san* (Hanako, the toilet-ghost) and the *murasaki baba* (the violet hag), or other specters such as the *jinmenken* (the human-faced dog) and the *kuchisake onna*, who wears a gauze mask on her mouth and turns out to be a dangerous creature that attacks pupils with a knife on their way back home, have been booming since the end of the 1980s. The first publishers who edited a collection of *gakkô no kaidan* in *manga* form were Kôdansha and Popula. Both series reached the huge number of around 400,000 copies sold. The successful series were followed by similar publications such as *Kaidan resutoran: Gakkô de wa kikoenaï motto kowai hanashi* (Thriller restaurant: Tremendously spooky tales not even heard in schools), edited by Matsutani Miyoko, Tsunemitsu Tôru and the Nihon Minwa no Kai (Society for Japanese Folk Tales). The movies *Gakkô no kaidan* I, II, and III, as well as *Toire no Hanako-san* were successful cinema versions of the genre.

The movie *Toire no Hanako-san* (1995) starts with the portrayal of a nonnal Japanese middle school just before the summer vacation. Two pupils enter the old school building and disappear. Now the spookiness begins. Their schoolmates, a young attractive mother and a smart young teacher search for them, but all get caught in the frightening building. Horrible things happen: The anatomy puppet and a huge stuffed bear come to life and threaten the children. The *kuchisake onna* is sitting in the first-aid room. A monstrous janitor chases the group across the

¹ While I was myself confronted with some frightening rumour of the *kuchisake onna* during a stay in Kyôto in 1983, I first became aware of *ikai*, the ghost-boom, its implications and significance in the beginning of the 1990s and started a little later to write on the topic (Gebhardt 1995 and 1996).

darkened corridors. Finally, the young teacher saves the children. He jumps with them through a black hole and they arrive in the real world. The teacher once reacted passively when he, still a schoolboy, witnessed the bullying (*ijime*) of a classmate. By his brave act he pays back the old debt. It becomes clear that a girl, a former pupil of the school who died, had lured the children into the haunted building because she felt lonely. It is striking that in the movies young girls play the most important role in the interaction with the 'occult'. While *shôjo*-culture in Japan is usually identified with the word *kawaii* (cute), one could say that also *kowai* (frightening) is an essential part of the young girls' world. In fact the infatuation of the *shôjo*-culture with occultism and with the so-called *chô-nôryoku* (超能力 supernatural powers) is deep. The children finally promise not to forget the girl who died. Now that all asocial behaviour is purged, the collective life in the school becomes harmonious again, as symbolised by the reenthronement of a Haniwa figure, the symbol of an intact community. The movies seem to be based on the theories of the healing effect of *ikai*, and the pedagogical intention is obvious: *Ikai* is used as a means to cure *ijime*.

Kadowaki Atsushi sees the concept of *ikai* as symptomatic of contemporary Japanese society, in which the 'other' has infiltrated human relations as the alien-like quality of estrangement. For him, *ikai* indicates a feeling of inauthenticity and dissolution of reality which he attributes to modern urban life. Kadowaki points out that *ikai* as he intends to understand it is synonymous with the increasing alienation felt in modern industrial societies. Children and adolescents are living in a world of reduced social interaction. The observation that the modern world we inhabit could be seen itself as an *ikai* is made by several researchers, including Miyata Noboru, who analyses the feelings of stress and fear and phenomena of social disorder such as nerdy solipsism (e.g. the *otaku-zoku*) and *ijime*. Compensation for absent cosiness in a competitive society is sought in retreat to subculture enclaves which mirror the 'ghastly' social circumstances and make them even more perceivable. As the psychiatrist Nakamura Mareaki (1994) explains, young people turn to 'occult' practices and develop an interest in the strange and the weird. He refers to the recent predilection for ghosts and monsters among school children. Occult games at school such as the *kokkurisan* (こっくりさん), occult programs on television, an increasing interest in the 'dark', for instance in *karuto* (the word derives from occult, it signifies black magic and sectarianism) and in necrophilia, the fascination with death and dead bodies, including strange murder cases, could be seen as the hard-core side of Japan's New Gothic. This was often attributed to the uncertainty and uneasiness felt because of the turn of the century (世紀末 *seikimatsu*).

Japanese intellectuals and their 'spiritual discourse'

Gakkô no kaidan, 'shôjo occultism' and the other popular versions of the Japanese ghost world are one side of the *ikai*-boom. The other side is 'intellectual *ikai*', as one can say that *ikai* was actually created by an academic circle of 'spiritists', including accomplished and well-known scholars of religion, folklorists, authors and critics. Popular *ikai* and 'intellectual *ikai*' are interwoven, as some scholars exploit the popular occult trend and publish widely on ghosts for a broader audience while at the same time expressing such a strong personal involvement in their research that it makes them almost look like the comrades of the ghosts.

Many Japan intellectuals are nowadays eager to rediscover the 'ghostly' or 'occult' Japanese 'tradition' as the basis of an 'indigenous' Japanese culture, of a Japanese 'spirituality.' The 'other world' stands for a nostalgic vision of a spiritual homeland for the modern Japanese people. It embraces the notion of a model in opposition to contemporary society and is central to the ongoing 'spiritual discourse' with its longing for a Japanese 'spiritual home.' In many texts employing the term *ikai*, the writers use it often in combination with the terms *saisei* (再生

rebirth), *yomigaeru* (蘇る to be born again) and *iyashi* (癒し healing). Academics such as Komatsu Kazuhiko who largely published on *ikai* (for an evaluation of Komatsu's work, see Gebhardt 2000) reveal their urge to renew contemporary culture with concepts from the past, with a sort of knowledge thought to be suppressed by the demands of modernity. As a 'liminal' or 'marginal' world *ikai* is understood to be a zone of regeneration that cures the sufferings of alienation, thought to be caused by the dominance of so-called Western values which are blamed to erase the traditions of Japanese culture. *Ikai* is thus the key word for a new folklorist and nativist discourse. The concept of 'intellectual *ikai*' includes a significant therapeutical aspect. This is the point where *ikai* meets with *seishin sekai* (精神世界 Spiritual World), the Japanese New Age.

New Age-thought has been adopted by several Japanese thinkers since the 1970s. Until recently, not much attention was given to the *seishin sekai*/New Age-phenomenon. Shimazono Susumu (University of Tôkyô), a scholar of religion, was the first to write on the subject. In his inspiring article 'New Age and New Spiritual Movements: The Role of Spiritual Intellectuals' from 1993, Shimazono declares that at least eight well-known Japanese thinkers and academics are to be looked on as 'spiritual intellectuals' (*reiseiteki chishikijin* 霊精的知識人; a term he coined): Umehara Takeshi (梅原猛 b.1925), Iwata Keiji (岩田慶治 b.1922), Kawai Hayao (河合隼雄 b.1928), Kurimoto Shin'ichirô (栗本信一郎 b.1941), Yamaori Tetsuo (山折哲雄 b.1931), Yuasa Yasuo (湯浅泰雄 b.1925), Kamata Tôji (鎌田東二 b.1951) and Nakazawa Shin'ichi (中沢真一 b.1950).

With their 'spiritual' messages, Umehara Takeshi, Kawai Hayao, Yamaori Tetsuo and others became partners for large publishers, and they were joined by well-known persons from the literary and art scenes, for example the graphic designer Tadanori Yokoo (横尾忠則 b. 1936) and the late author Nakagami Kenji (中上健次 1946-1992), as well as by several younger academics with similar interests and inclinations. Those older 'spiritual intellectuals', mainly trained in Japanese folklore, anthropology and religion, stand for a conservative argumentation which tends to stress issues of Japaneseness. Some provocative views are for example to be found in the works of Umehara Takeshi, the former director of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken): He is the head of what could be called the 'spiritual old boy's network'. Kamata Tôji and Nakazawa Shin'ichi belong to a younger generation, and their writings and personalities correspond to the media world of the 1980s described in terms such as postmodernism and consumerism. They were born around 1950 and grew up in the cultural mood of the 1960s and 1970s. When they engaged in the discourse on spirituality and the world of spirits, they perhaps did so partially out of their experience of the Spiritual World as apart of 1960s' counterculture, that is to say they were attracted to the more anarchic sides of the spirituality movements.

The striking popularity of religious, esoteric, and 'occult' themes and practices in contemporary Japan was also the target of harsh journalistic criticism (Kimura 1998), and finally became the subject of several research activities (as for example the panel *Japanische Identität im Millennium - Okkultismus, New Age und Lifestyle / Japanese Identity in the Millennium - Occultism, New Age and Lifestyle*, 1999). Following the line of Shimazono's pioneer work (e.g. Shimazono 1993 and 1996), in the last three years some informative articles concerning main aspects of the Japanese New Age and the argumentations of the 'spiritual intellectuals' were written (e.g. Prohl 1997, Wöhr 1997, Fukasawa 2000). The thesis of Inken Prohl (University of Berlin) completed in 1999, analyses from the standpoint of religious studies the contents of works by five main representatives of the 'spiritual intellectuals' and explores the relationship of these writings with the international New Age-movement. The study argues on the use and

the function of the key term 'spirituality' and comments critically on central terms such as 'animism' or 'shamanism'. Prohl suggests that the texts of the five thinkers can be productively taken up as a type of religious *nihonjinron* (discourse on Japaneseness/nativist discourse).

In the study *Japanische Gegenwartsliteratur im Zeichen der 'neuen Spiritualität'*. *Eine Analyse aktueller Diskurse* (Japanese contemporary literature and the 'new spirituality'. An analysis of recent discourses) I try to juxtapose the *seishin sekai*-phenomena along with the more folkloristic *ikai*-boom and the literary adaptations of religious issues in texts by Japanese authors written mainly during the 1980s and 1990s. The result is a tableau of contemporary Japanese cultural discourse led by intellectuals and academics who cultivate their yearning for a Japanese or Asian identity. The study provides us with a blue print of current Japanese nostalgic moods and vulnerable emotions which are probably due to the lack of a 'grand narration' as well. So, the 'spiritual discourse' functions as a 'little narration' for people who are looking for some 'sense', for a possible orientation or even for a vision of a new Asian-centered century.

While the 'spiritual intellectuals' mostly show an optimistic attitude towards the issue of 'spirituality' and religion, the texts of Japanese authors are more differentiated and mirror by their greater diversity several other approaches to religious issues.

Religion as a theme of recent literary texts

In the following I should like to present an introduction to three literary versions of the religious theme. These are Tatematsu Wahei's *Chirei* (地霊 Divine Indwelling, 1999), a portrayal of a new religion that offers itself as the last home and refuge for those who have been driven to the margins of society; Murakami's critique (1994) of a community founded on a new religion; and Ôe Kenzaburô's most recent novel *Chûgaeri* (宙返り Somersault, 1999), in which the Nobel Prize-winning author likewise expresses his views on the subject of religion in general and Japan's new religions in particular.

Tatematsu Wabei's *Chirei* (1999): The 'neo-religious community' as a last borne and refuge in an inhospitable modern age

The novel *Chirei* (Divine Indwelling) was published in November 1999 as the fourth volume of the author's well-known village saga, which began in 1980 with *Enrai* (遠雷 Distant Thunder). The point de depart of the story is the release of Mitsuo, the protagonist, from prison and his return to his home village, where he initially stays with his mother: The era of the all-powerful economic surge (Tatematsu: *keizai mannô no jidai* 1999: 386) is over and gone. The concrete-block apartment complex to which the village has been forced to give way carries the telltale signs of decline and fall. A 'slum' has arisen, haunted by a 'malevolent spirit.' Hirotsugu, a friend of Mitsuos, and Mitsuo's mother Tomiko have erected on the last piece of land that they have managed to retain a building that they call Goseidô (the sacred hall), a tabernacle to their new religion, based on Buddhist teachings. This new religion has no name. Hirotsugu and Tomiko, who do not strive for material success, hold the view that such would only distract from the cause. The religious body (教団 *kyôdan*) enjoys no governmental recognition as such and only gradually begins to take on more solid contours. Hirotsugu, who is convinced that he possesses the powers of a medium, functions as a 'channeler' (霊媒 *reibai*) and is characterized as a *kyûhôsha* (求法者 a seeker of dharma), striving for ultimate truth, for the achievement of enlightenment (悟り *satori*). Daily he sits in meditation (座禅 *zazen*) and engages in other

religious exercises (修行 *shugyô*). Tomiko reveres Hirotsugu as a religious master and, as his first adept, documents his pronouncements with audio tape recordings.

In *Chirei*, Tatematsu Wabei draws the dense portrait of a peopled landscape, in which the surroundings shift so quickly that the inhabitants cannot adapt; they react to the new circumstances thus forced upon them with a combination of aggression and despair. Hirotsugu, the initiator of the religious group, has found in religion a means to liberate himself from the past and all the feelings of hatred and guilt that are bound up with it. He regards it as 'a way for helping others and, at the same time, for healing oneself (*hito wo tasukeru to dôji ni, jibun mo iyasareru michi*). The sacred hall signifies for him and Tomiko a substitute for the lost home that was their 'village'. When Mitsuo indicates scepticism, Hirotsugu says to him: '*koko ga mura nan da*' (here is our village).

The hall, the architectural antithesis of the decaying apartment house, is to be the place to which 'all people from the forests and from the cities' can return. (It might be noted in passing that the motif of the keeper of the village tradition can also be found in the early work of Ôe Kenzaburô.) According to the plan worked out by Hirotsugu, who says that he is in communion with 'spirit of the earth,' the new religion will continue to grow. The old land, including Mitsuo's property, is to be repurchased. Hirotsugu believes in the renewal of the devastated community and in the power of the forest and of nature herself, who, once raped by the bulldozers, has begun to avenge herself. The 'loss of nature' is an idea that Mita Munesuke (who writes essays under the name of Maki Yûsuke (榎木悠介 b. 1937), another 'spiritual intellectual' and ghostsearcher, has already articulated in his famous collection of essays *Kiryû no naru oto. Kôkyô suru komyûn* (気流の鳴る音。交響するコミュニケーション The Sound of Airwaves. The Sinfony of Communes, 1977).

In the afterword of the novel, serialized in the magazine *Bungei* from early 1995 to the autumn of 1999, the author Tatematsu comes across as pessimistic: he regards the course of contemporary Japanese society as uncertain. In the face of the violence carried out by the Aum cult, he does not wish to be locked into the view of 'religion' as potential salvation. He is instead a fellow traveller on his protagonists' journey. Tatematsu's outsiders, whom he portrays in *Chirei* as societal victims, seek to find worth and self-esteem as religious leaders. Their goal is to reassure themselves a place in society. With 'religion' they are able to create a refuge that will enable them to survive in a dark and hostile environment.

Murakami Masahiko's *Maô* (1993/1994): a sceptical perspective

Murakami Masahiko's novel *Maô* (魔王 The Demon King) was published as a monograph in 1994. The first part appeared in 1993 under the same title in the magazine *Subaru*; the second part appeared in May and October under the name *Seijin shôden* (Brief Biography of a Saint). In the first chapter of the novel, the story concerns the rise and fall of Enami 'Hijiri' (聖 'Saint'), the leader of the new religion Sekai Taichiryô-kyô. The narrator is his former wetnurse and his first disciple. The second chapter contains the research of a journalist, who reports anecdotes from Hijiri's life and gives an account of the legacy he leaves after his death.

Hijiri is a difficult child, prone to temper tantrums, and cannot bear to be slighted. He kills his rival Yoshio, the eldest son of the healer, who may also be his own father, and takes his place. His subsequent rise in the world is likewise marked by unscrupulousness. While still a schoolboy, he impregnates Yûko, the daughter of an influential politician and forces a marriage that gives him access to his father-in-law's power. After studying abroad in Germany,

accompanied by Yûko and his loyal wetnurse Chie, Hijiri assumes the leadership of the 'Universal Healer Association.' Not long thereafter he mounts the political stage. The media direct their attention to the young politician, whose background is so unusual.

On the surface Hijiri goes along with this, primarily in order to cloak the true circumstances of his birth and the fact that his mother has lived 'like a dog' and been mistreated by over twenty men (the 'assistants' of the healer), any of whom could have been Hijiri's father. He even arranges the death of a journalist who comes too close to this secret. His efforts to win a parliamentary seat are undone by the betrayal of his secretary: his political career is thus nipped in the bud. It is at this point that Hijiri plans a career as a religious leader. His discipleship consists almost entirely of women, whom he sends out two by two as 'sisters' throughout Japan for the purpose of earning money as prostitutes. The proceeds are then sent to his headquarters. Through the fortune he thereby accumulates, Hijiri wins political influence; he gains additional power through his contacts in the political world, who come to him for advice on matters of health.

At the age of 60, the guru has achieved nearly all his goals. He has gained considerable political clout and an unconditionally loyal harem, providing him with children, his biological legacy. As his visions begin to take on cosmic dimensions, he hastens towards a fatal debacle. An informant provides the media with inside information. Hijiri must withdraw completely into his headquarter in Hakone. Thus besieged, he resolves to dissolve the religious community and flee abroad. He places the burden of liquidating the cult's various businesses on Chie's shoulders. She is already suffering from Hijiri's egotism and coldness.

Her only source of joy is Sayuri, the retarded daughter of Hijiri and Yûko. The girl strongly resembles Hijiri when he was a child. Chie knows that Hijiri wants to use her as the sacrificial lamb that will allow him to save himself from the unpleasant fate that is awaiting him. Sadly she informs Sayuri that she will have to leave her. Sayuri runs into the room in which Hijiri is sleeping. A quarrel ensues: Hijiri strikes Chie with an ashtray, whereupon Sayuri throws him to the floor and severs his throat with her own teeth. Thus, in the end, we are told, the sordid life of the religious leader finds a fitting finale.

The last sections of the novel are surprising, offering as they do the events that follow Hijiri's death. We learn that though, like Herod, he has had all male offspring slain, he nonetheless has an heir and successor. The son of Cony, a Filipina, he is working as a healer in his mother's homeland. At first he presents himself as a girl, Maria, then, however, as a messiah proclaiming the 'resurrection of the holy one' (*seisha no fukkatsu*). He demonstrates the same charismatic traits that characterized his father. Cony and her son found yet another new religion, this time with a Christian influence.

Murakami Masahiko's *Maô* is, as it were, a biting parody of the new religions; it describes the neo-religious communities as outgrowths of a corrupt, decadent society and the religious personality as psychopathological. Hijiri is portrayed as a person damaged since his childhood; initially himself a victim, he becomes a victimizer.

For Hijiri, religion is primarily a business and a means to absolute power over others. 'Faith' (*shinkô*) personally means nothing to him, but he knows full well that it means everything to the believer. Religion, like sexuality, to which his cult is so intimately linked, is a realm of murky contours, filled with projections, wishful imaginings, and taboos. This liminal status of religion also allows it to be exploited in accordance with arbitrary desires and manipulative

purposes. As Hijiri recognizes, the religious leader stands far beyond good and evil and thereby also well above his parttime ideals of actor and politician.

Whether the return of this religious leader is for the good of the world remains dubious. Maria's disciples proclaim that they have been cured of cancer and AIDS, thereby leading to the conclusion that Maria's religion too cannot get by without a measure of deception and self-deception. Murakami's scepticism vis-a-vis the new religions and a society that provides fertile soil for them persists: the novel is predicated on an ironic admonition to those leading religious causes to religiously active, urging them to make a full confession for the sake of their adherents. In this respect Murakami's point of view is similar to that of the author Date Ikkô (伊達一行), who early on undertook a critical evaluation of Japan's turn to 'religion'. His vehicle is his novel *Kanashimi no Kyûbere* (Sad Cybele, 1985), a portrait of the Cybele cult in the ancient world.

Ôe Kenzaburô's *Chûgaeri* (1999): millenarian manierisms

Until now Ôe Kenzaburô has certainly been not perceived as a writer preoccupied with religious themes or even having an interest in the *seishin sekai*. Yet along with this comes the recognition that in his writings Ôe has been pursuing 'spiritual-alternative' ideas since the 1970s. In the 1980s one detects a clear 'spiritual turning point' in his work; in *Jinsei no shinseki* (人生の親戚 Kinship of Life, 1989), *Chiryôtô* (治療塔 Therapy Station, 1990) and *Chiryôtô wakusei* (治療塔惑星 Therapy Planet, 1991), for example, he focuses on eschatological visions and millenarian longings for salvation. The three-part novel that Ôe had once announced as his last work, is even more strongly concerned with the religious. *Moeagaru midori no ki* (燃えあがる緑の木 Evergreen Aflame, 1993/1995), the title inspired by lines from W. B. Yeats' poem *Vacillation*, portrays the birth of a new community, formed round a 'saviour' (*sukuinushi*).

In the two-column novel *Chûgaeri*, published by Kôdansha in 1999, Ôe further develops the theme of the community based on a new religion. In the first volume we learn of Kizu, a university art lecturer and painter, an older man, who has had an operation for cancer and now fears a relapse. Parallel to his story is that of present and past events concerning a religious community, which consists of the two leaders, the patron, also called 'saviour', and the guide or 'prophet'. The patron and the guide are the initiators of a new religion, preaching a millenarian doctrine, that some years before had caused a great stir in the media. The 'radical faction' (*kyûshinha*) within the group had planned a terrorist act, of which the founders, being unable to identify with the undertaking, had notified the authorities. The incident has been described as a 'somersault,' as it marks a major turning point within the community. Ôe is alluding to the Aum attack; the cult is identified by name in the text and receives considerable attention in the latter half of the work.

Responding to the plea of the patron, who wishes to resume his religious activity, Kizu promptly takes over from the ailing guide, assuming the role of new guide. His reward is to be, with the help of the patron's healing power, the conquest of the unfortunate influences affecting his mind and body. The second part of the novel continues where *Moeagaru midori no ki* left off. The setting is again the village in Shikoku. For all his efforts, Kizu now succumbs to the cancer that has afflicted him, and the leadership of the new religion is then taken over by younger members of the religious group.

The religious enterprise, as carried out by the patron and the guide, are described, particularly through the comparison with Aum Shinrikyô, as probably dangerous. The teachings, which

the patron himself partially recants, are however not clearly outlined. In the foreground is the force of the apocalyptic, along with that of 'salvation,' 'new life' (*saisei*), and the 'mystical experience' or 'mysterious divine encounter' (神との神秘体験 *kami to no shinpi taiken*); regarding his protagonists, the author speaks of a development that proceeds from both the Hebrew Bible and primitive Buddhist scriptures (原始仏教 *genshi bukk'yô*) towards the *kami to no shinpi taiken*.

However difficult it might be to comprehend precisely what constitute the old eschatology and the reformed doctrine of the 'new man,' the author ultimately argues for self-discovery or self-liberation as the 'way of salvation.' In the case of Kizu this means the fulfilment of the homosexual tendencies that he has always suppressed. He is able to carry on to the end of his life by engaging in sexual acts of which he has long dreamt. The sexual experience is in his case as it seems similar to a religious conversion. The intuitive concern and care that Ikuo showers on the old man, as well as the characterization of Ikuo as an extraordinary individual, convey the impression that, above and beyond sexual fulfilment, he bestows 'salvation' on Kizu, though one could raise the objection, as in his novel *Jinsei no shinseki* (Kinship of Life), Ôe brings in the religious dimension simply to purify the issue of sexuality which would otherwise not be tolerated by the bourgeois morality that Ôe's protagonists mostly cultivate. Ôe's novel, like Endô Shûsaku's (遠藤周作) *Fukai kawa* (深い河 Deep River, 1993), was understood as the report of a veteran thinker to a nation in the throes of a 'spiritual crisis'. Yet Ôe ultimately offers no helpful information on how the Aum affair might be interpreted, what role religion plays in Japanese society, and how communities founded in the name of new religions are to be evaluated. To that extent, *Chûgaeri* does its somersaults in the narrow cosmos of Ôe-esque constructs: anarchy and rebirth, salvation and self-deliverance. In taking up the issue of Aum, he simply brings in millenarian posturings; from the standpoint of today's urgent social problems, which Ôe always claims to be the target of his writings, these offer no solution.

The contribution of Japan's literary world to the theme of religion and new religious communities mirrors the stance of Japanese intellectuals divided between two camps: those who support the cause of religion as a source of meaning in the midst of meaningless modernity and those who are its sceptics and critics. Some writers and intellectuals, such as Tatematsu and Ôe, assume an equivocal position or – as can be claimed in the case of Ôe (and for example Yoshimoto Banana) – adopt messages from the *seishin sekai* to heighten their own popularity. That is to say the authors are good trendwatchers and are obviously well aware of the 'spirituality' issue.

Religion and the search for the 'spiritual' continue to hold a lofty position in cultural discourse, and this is not likely to change anytime soon. It should be borne in mind however that the realm of religion for many Japanese represents not only an encounter with the earnest questions of human existence; it is also an element of recreation and personal lifestyle: something to 'experience'. A *roman à clef* about the Aum incident and about how Japan's 'spiritual intellectuals' think and act is admittedly yet to be written, and until this text will appear, you may say there are 'spiritual intellectuals' and sceptics among Japanese literati, but no one who comments on the 'spiritual' yearnings hidden within contemporary Japanese cultural discourse.

From 'ikai' to 'ikaigaku' – final comment

The 'world beyond' in contemporary Japan, as we can already sense, covers a broad territory. Two components are nostalgia and reassurance of identity, a third is the integration of the 'occult' and the religious in the media business and the metropolitan lifestyle. Considering the

various 'ikaisms' of contemporary Japan, there seems to be the need for an '*ikaigaku*' within the field of Japanese studies. Indeed, a new approach to contemporary Japanese cultural discourse that centers around the question of identity and religion should be today more than the usual *nihonjinron*-critique. It would have to be an 'analysis of intentions' (Fukasawa 2000), a close reading of historical and contemporary texts from different realms and disciplines such as philosophy,² cultural philosophy, literature, anthropology, folklore studies and religious studies, a survey on Japanese cultural institutions and cultural politics, and finally an observation of lifestyle trends, consumer attitudes and marketing strategies.

Lisette Gebhardt, 2001

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² The recently published article on Hamaguchi Eshun's philosophical constructions written by Margaret Sleeboom (JAWS Newsletter No. 32, June 2000) is a good approach to the complex.

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