

# ‘Creating Utopia’: The History of *Kōfuku no Kagaku* in Austria, 1989–2012, with an Introduction to Its General History and Doctrine

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## 1. Introduction

Sharing a number of common characteristics of many newly emerged religious movements in contemporary East Asia, such as the focus on a founding figure or a charismatic leader, doctrinal this-worldliness, a conspicuously millenarian trajectory, or—arising from the latter—an augmented propensity for political activism (Pokorny 2011: 178), *Kōfuku no Kagaku* (KnK, ‘Science of Happiness’) or ‘Happy Science’,<sup>1</sup> within several years, has evolved into a major player in recent Japanese religious history. Impelled by universal salvational goals, early on KnK proclaimed the aim to become a globalised religion. Compliant with other Japanese new religious movements, immigration has pre-eminently facilitated KnK’s expansion abroad. However, slowly, KnK has also been recognised by a non-Japanese audience as a distinct supplier of ‘spirituality’ and related ritual service, enabling the group to recruit sympathisers and members outwith the Japanese Diaspora (Clarke 2000: 6).

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*Notes on Romanisation and Style:* Japanese terms and names are romanised using the Modified Hepburn System. Chinese names are romanised following the *Hānyū Pīnyīn* system. Japanese names (excepting those which have been anonymised) are written according to East Asian custom: family name precedes personal name. Names of former and current members of the Austrian group have been anonymised by request.

<sup>1</sup> This is the official name used since 2008. Prior to that, internationally the movement carried the name *The Institute for Research in Human Happiness*, which was abbreviated *IRH* or *IRHH* (depending on copyright issues in the different countries of its missionary work).

In the same way, the Austrian branch has been established and maintained by Japanese immigrants, yet, who, unlike missionary pioneers of other national groups, were introduced and converted to KnK whilst already being abroad. Austrian KnK has become one of the first international destinations of the movement, embarking on the pivotal millenarian task to create 'utopia', that is, to work towards universal happiness and worldly harmony. After more than twenty years in Vienna, the public echo of the group's soteriological agenda is still liminal, however, commencing in the late 1990s, it satisfies demands of a specific clientele, which hails from a mostly esoteric background. In so doing, Austrian KnK has become a relevant provider for a particular segment of the local religious market, representing a fascinating example of a diasporic Japanese new religious movement that searches intently for its place in Austria's growingly pluralistic religious landscape. This and the fact that KnK, despite its relatively prominent status in Japan, is still largely unknown in a Western context, renders a scholarly investigation indeed a desideratum.

This paper offers a first comprehensive study of KnK in Austria, delineating the group's history from its early beginnings in 1989 until late 2012 (section 4). The discussion is based on a *micro-historical* narrative and provides rich insights into the development of a new entrant into the religious scenery of contemporary Austria. Additionally, the first part of the study (sections 2 & 3) introduces the general history and the main doctrinal tenets of KnK, both of which are most crucial to understand the subsequent discussion. Section 5 aims to outline a common 'member profile' of non-Japanese followers of Austrian KnK, portraying four relatively active members with a focus on their religious background and their current position towards the new creed. It is meant to supplement the thorough description and analysis of the historical development, indicating the general religious orientation of the movement's current non-Japanese 'membership'.

For the historical documentation, the authors draw on a variety of sources. Semi-structured guided interviews have been conducted with nine (that is, one former and eight present) adherents of Austrian KnK, one of whom wanted to remain anonymous. The information provided was supported and confirmed, wherever possible, through extensive participant observation, counter-checking of transcripts, thorough scrutiny of group-internal archive materials, internet research, and widespread primary as well as secondary readings. The main purpose of this study is not to give a fully fledged sociological analysis but a detailed historical account of a newly

emerged ethnic Japanese religion having been active, yet barely noticed, in Austria since 1989.

## 2. The History of *Kōfuku no Kagaku*

KnK is one of the best known Japanese so-called *New New Religions* (*shin-shinshūkyō*), that is, religious movements which came into being or reached their peak in the last decades and especially since the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> The group was founded in 1986 by the then 30 years old Ōkawa Ryūhō (b. 1956) born as Nakagawa Takashi in the small town of Kawashima on the island of Shikoku,<sup>3</sup> in Tōkyō. After a rather calm period as a ‘study group’ of spiritual messages purported by its founder in the 1980s, KnK began to present itself through big mass-events in the surroundings of Tōkyō at the beginning of the 1990s and thereby changed its main concepts and beliefs. On the one hand this self-representation was the starting point for a rapid growth in membership, which rose dramatically in the following years. On the other hand, the movement became entangled in a highly controversial media-discussion which was enhanced by the movement’s reaction towards the mass media.

The beginnings were relatively calm: The first publications ever made in the context of KnK are reports of Ōkawa’s contacts with representatives of the spiritual world. These *reigen* (‘spiritual words’), which have been published since the mid-1980s, are collections of interviews which were allegedly made with Ōkawa who has been acting as a spiritual medium.<sup>4</sup>

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2 The concept of *shin-shinshūkyō* as different from *shinshūkyō* was originally coined by Nishiyama Shigeru (b. 1942) to distinguish recent developments in the field of new religions, as major changes in Japanese society gave rise to new forms of religious communities. It is mainly used for groups having originated over the last couple of decades, which share a number of characteristics, *inter alia*, the importance of newer forms of media to promote their ideas, references to a vast array of concepts of a ‘spirit world’ (*reikai*) as distinguished from the physical world—KnK commonly uses the terms *kono yo* (‘this world’) and *ano yo* (‘that world’)—or their markedly ‘syncretistic’ approach to various religious traditions. For a discussion of the terminology, see the critical article of Inoue 1997; the same volume of the journal *Shūkyō to shakai* contains articles of Nishiyama Shigeru and Shimazono Susumu (b. 1948), who both support the idea of a separate category of *shin-shinshūkyō*. See also Astley 2001: 102-104; Clarke 1999: 12-14.

3 Although the official change of name (from Nakagawa Takashi to Ōkawa Ryūhō) took place in 1986 with the official foundation of *Kōfuku no Kagaku* we shall use this name throughout this paper, as it is the common and well known one.

4 Astley 1995: 367-8; Winter 2008 and Winter 2012: 41-57.

According to the official storyline, the initial contact happened already in 1981: Through ‘automatic writing’ (*jidōshoki*) Ōkawa began to converse first with Nikkō (1246–1333), one of the disciples of the Buddhist reformer Nichiren (1222–1282), then with Nichiren himself who prepared him for his mission for mankind with the formula *hito o aishi, hito o ikashi, hito o yuruse* (‘Love People, Make the Best of People, Forgive People’).<sup>5</sup> After this encounter Ōkawa confided this secret to a close friend, who began to act as the ‘interviewer’ of Ōkawa, representing various figures of the philosophical and religious history of East and West through spiritual mediumship. Therein he was speaking *as* Nichiren, Jesus, Socrates, Lǎozǐ and other eminent figures.<sup>6</sup> The books were published under the name of the alleged ‘interviewer’, Yoshikawa Saburō, which was the pen-name of Ōkawa’s father, Nakagawa Tadayoshi (1921–2003), as was revealed at the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> The material presented therein may be interpreted as belonging to the vast array of *channelling* literature. This genre was one of the starting points of the so-called Euro-American New Age-movement (Hanegraaff 1996: 24–41), and many texts belonging to this tradition have been translated into Japanese since the 1970s.<sup>8</sup> In Japan these publications are commonly referred to as belonging to the *seishin sekai* (‘spiritual world’) literature, which has been interpreted as an adaptation of the Euro-American New Age in Japan. However, there is still a debate whether it is useful to introduce this category and to speak of the *seishin sekai* as a mere ‘reception’ of the New Age. It is a fact that major issues and topics which have to be connected to the New Age-current play a role in Japan (as

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5 Cf. Ōkawa 1994a: 351 and Ōkawa 1996: 139.

6 The books published in the mid-1980s are: *Nichiren shōnin no reigen* (Yoshikawa 1985b), *Kūkai no reigen* (Yoshikawa 1985a), *Kirisuto no reigen* (Yoshikawa 1986c), *Amaterasu Ōmikami no reigen* (Yoshikawa 1986a), *Sokratesu no reigen* (Yoshikawa 1986e), *Sakamoto Ryōma no reigen* (Yoshikawa 1986d), *Himiko no reigen* (Yoshikawa 1986b) and *Kōshi no reigen* (Yoshikawa 1987).

7 Cf. Astley 1995: 377. Nowadays the identity of Yoshikawa Saburō is ‘officially’ acknowledged by the group. In the *Seichi Shikoku Shōshinkan*, which was built in 2000 near Naruto on Shikoku island, there is the *Yoshikawa Saburō Kinendō* (‘Yoshikawa Saburō commemoration hall’), where the audio-instruments used for recording the spiritual messages and the notebooks are exhibited. The group claims that the reason why the name has been changed was to protect Ōkawa, who was then, that is, in the first half of the 1980s, still working in a trading company.

8 It should be noted that the use of the expression *reigen* is typical for this context. This term was used in Japanese translations of the mainly American channelling writings. For example, the book by the medium Maurice Barbanell (1902–1981), who was channelling a being named *Silver Birch*, was translated into Japanese in 1981 as *Shirubā Bachi reigenshū*; the so-called ‘White Eagle’-revelations of the medium Grace Cooke (d. 1979) were published in 1986.

exactly this example here shows), but the main question is whether they form a separate category. The Western New Age can be interpreted as a major break with the dominating religious stratum, namely the Christian paradigm, and the emergence of an already long existing current commonly referred to as ‘Western Esotericism’.<sup>9</sup>

Japan, on the other hand, was never under the influence of just one religious tradition but several traditions which became important in the course of their adaptation. Thus, integration of texts belonging to the tradition of Western New Age should not be interpreted as a new chapter in the history of Japanese religions.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, whilst the idea of getting into contact with a world beyond is a common feature in the formation of many of the new religious movements since the 19th century (Staemmler 2009: 112-16; Stalker 2008: 76-8), Ōkawa’s *reigen* show a clear resemblance to the *channelling*-genre. The references are more than obvious with regard to the main content of these publications: There is extensive information on the coming of a ‘new age’ (*shinjidai*), which will bring along a ‘new civilisation’ (*shinbunmei*). Certain topics referred to are also well known features of Western New Age-literature: Thorough information on mythical civilisations and ‘lost continents’, which once flourished but later were destroyed (like Atlantis or the continent *Mu*), secret traditions, which had been alive since ancient times and give insight into the reality behind certain historical events, the importance of the ‘spiritual world’, and how to get in contact with it. All this information forms the major part of these publications which show many parallels to their Western counterparts.<sup>11</sup> In addition, Ōkawa himself discusses writings of the Western *channelling*-genre in his *reigen*,<sup>12</sup> and places himself in this

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9 This interpretation of the origin of the New Age is the main argument in Hanegraaff’s important work on this topic (Hanegraaff 1996).

10 See, for example, the important remarks by Michael Pye 2002 in his review of Prohl 2000. In addition recent studies also challenge the idea of the importance of the *seishin sekai*, which is mainly connected with the assumption of the importance of the so-called ‘religious boom’ (*shūkyō būmu*) since the 1970s. This has been mainly claimed by the media on various levels, whilst academic studies in this context show a much more differentiated picture. Cf. Ishii 1995.

11 On the particularities of the Japanese *seishin sekai* and its interpretation, see Fukusawa 2001 and Prohl 2007.

12 In *Nichiren shōnin no reigen* he deals extensively with the ‘problematic aspects’ (*mondaiten*) of the spiritual message of the being *Silver Birch*, which was channelled by the medium Maurice Barbanell from the 1960s to 1981 (Yoshikawa 1985b: 191-203). These texts were translated into Japanese in 1984, one year before the publication of Ōkawa’s first *reigen* (under the name of Yoshikawa).

tradition.<sup>13</sup> Ōkawa's publications are also part of a specific period in the 1980s when *channelling* became extremely popular on a worldwide level, a phenomenon which once was labelled the 'popular channelling craze'.<sup>14</sup> However, the further development of Ōkawa's writings shows major differences and resulted in a new concept. The first publications, which share much in common with the aforementioned *channelling* material, were soon replaced by new publications, which clearly mark a shift in Ōkawa's self-perception after the official foundation of KnK in 1986. After a set of books comprising new spiritual messages in which Ōkawa presented channelled material in a more authoritative way as a spiritual teacher (and not as a 'mere' medium),<sup>15</sup> a new series of books was put forward in 1987, which was called the 'law-series' (*hō-shirīzu*). The first three books of this collection, namely *Taiyō no hō* ('The Laws of the Sun', Ōkawa 1987d), *Ōgon no hō* ('The Golden Laws', Ōkawa 1987c) and *Eien no hō* ('The Laws of Eternity', Ōkawa 1987a),<sup>16</sup> are said to contain all the basic teachings on cosmology, anthropology and ethics and may be regarded as the fundamental doctrinal texts of the group, despite undergoing a couple of major revisions in the course of the further development of the movement. They were presented as the final revelations of the Buddha, as is evident from the picture used on the cover of the original publications showing a traditional Buddha statue and the subtext with direct references to the historical Buddha.<sup>17</sup>

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13 See Okawa 1994: 127-58. In this section on the 'secret of channelling' he mainly refers to the universalistic dimension of the *channelling* tradition, when he draws parallels to practices described in the *Kojiki* or the *Nihon shoki*. This stress on the importance of *channelling* as a tool and master-key for the interpretation of any form of religious contact with a world beyond is typical and popular in many presentations of the genre (see, for example, Bjorling 1992: 3 and Klimo 1988: 2). This idea is challenged by Hanegraaff 1996: 25-6, who refers to this assumption as an unproven claim.

14 Hanegraaff 1996: 41, with reference to the importance of the book *Out on a limb* written by the popular American actress Shirley Maclaine (b. 1934) and the subsequent TV-mini-series (1987), which was highly acclaimed in Japan as well (Gebhardt 2001: 22).

15 The new series includes, amongst others, *Nichiren shōnin reijishū* (Ōkawa 1987b) and *Iesu Kirisuto reijishū* (Ōkawa 1988a). With regard to its content there is no big difference to the material provided in the Yoshikawa-book-series.

16 All the three books were published in 1987, from June to October.

17 The *Taiyō no hō* is presented as containing 'revelations of the Buddha illuminating the new age' (*shinjidai o terasu shaka no keiji*); *Ōgon no hō* is telling of 'the intelligence of Buddha revealing the new civilisation' (*shinbunmei o hiraku shaka no eichi*); *Eien no hō* is said to give information on 'the glory of Buddha illuminating the new world' (*shinsekai o shimesu shaka no kōmyō*). The subtitles have been the object of constant change in further editions which reflect the doctrinal development. It is also

Soon after this presentation of new teachings of the Buddha, Ōkawa began to present *himself* as the reincarnation of the Buddha, not only his spiritual messenger. This was done publicly in 1989 in a book titled *Budda saitan* (‘The Rebirth of Buddha’) (Ōkawa 1989a), whilst he allegedly mentioned this insight already to a number of followers before that time. What follows is a systematic re-interpretation of the main teachings of Ōkawa focussing on his new role. The core message is that Ōkawa is representing the reincarnation of Buddha and the doctrine of KnK is fundamentally Buddhist (Cornille 1998: 288). This is worth being noted as this emphasis on Buddhism changed a little bit later when Ōkawa was presenting the final truth with regard to his nature, which was done officially in the year 1991 in the so-called ‘El Cantare Declaration’ (*Eru Kantāre sengen*) in the Tōkyō Dome in a big mass event.<sup>18</sup> The main message of this event, which marked a new phase in the history of this movement, was that Ōkawa is the reincarnation of a spiritual being called *El Cantare* (*Eru Kantāre*).<sup>19</sup> This ‘consciousness’ (*ishiki*) already had a number of reincarnations before Ōkawa and the Buddha. A canonical list contains the following mythical personalities:

*El Cantare* has been

- *La Mu*, a king on the continent *Mu*
- *Thos*, a king on the continent *Atlantis*
- *Rient Arl Croud*, a king in the ancient Inca-kingdom
- *Ophealis*, acting in Archaic Greece in a time before Hermes
- *Hermes* in Ancient Greece
- *Buddha* in India
- *Ōkawa Ryūhō* in present-day Japan.

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worth noting that the original versions—although referring to the Buddha on the title pages—technically and primarily used the term *shinri* (‘God’s truth’); this was replaced by *buppō shinri* (‘Truth of Buddha’s Teachings’) in the following editions. This is a preliminary of the following ‘Buddhisiation’ of the message, which became important since the end of the 1980s.

<sup>18</sup> For a description of this event, see Astley 1995: 360-2, Baffelli 2007: 89-90, Winter 2008: 74-6.

<sup>19</sup> This idiosyncratic expression is obviously inspired by terminology used by the founder of the new religious movement *GLA*, Takahashi Shinji (1927–1976).

With the introduction of this new scheme the initial concept of Ōkawa as the reincarnation of the Buddha was broadened: *El Cantare* is not only relevant for India and Japan but lived in all the important ages and times of a (mythical) history of mankind. It comprises—so to speak—the whole history of humanity, in the East and West, the North and South, including the ‘lost continents’ Atlantis and *Mu*.<sup>20</sup> This important new version of the doctrine led to a revision of the older publications, particularly some changes in the terminology and additions to the older versions.<sup>21</sup> After the aforementioned official declaration of the new ‘*El Cantare*-truth’ a revised version of the above mentioned three fundamental *hō*-books appeared, which were called the ‘new’ (*shin*)-series. Interestingly, the mentioning of the *shaka* in the subtitles of the books is now replaced by explicit references to *El Cantare*. The book *Shin-Taikyō no hō*, for instance, is said to contain *Eru Kantāre e no michi* (‘The way to El Cantare’).<sup>22</sup> The most important difference to the first books—besides corrections of several too radical prophecies and changes in several doctrinal aspects—is the reference to the system of reincarnations of the *El Cantare*-being, which is now found in the most important and fundamental book, *Taikyō no hō*, in a special annex (Ōkawa 1994a: 358-9).

This new definition of the founder’s function was introduced at the beginning of the 1990s in a couple of mass events, of which the *El Cantare proclamation* in July 1991 was the most decisive. These events were accompanied by an intensive media coverage which became more and more critical towards the new religious scenery. At its peak it caused a major clash with the mass media which culminated in the so-called *Friday* or *Kōdansha affair* (*Furaidē/Kōdansha jiken*). In a couple of magazines, mainly of the *Kōdansha* publishing house—including the weekly scandal

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20 The concept of ‘lost continents’ and its specific interpretation has its origin mainly in 19th century Europe, but was early adopted in the Japanese context. It is an important feature of the aforementioned *seishin sekai*-movement and of particular importance for a specific tradition of ‘ancient history’, that is, *chō-kodaishi* (ultra-ancient history) which is focussed on the prehistory of Japan and its alleged importance in a time beyond the common descriptions of the history of the world. Therein the continent *Mu*, originally introduced by the English author James Churchward (1852–1936) and located in the Pacific Ocean was of particular interest for Japan (Winter 2012: 205-38).

21 Ōkawa himself is speaking of the uppermost importance of this new message with consequences for the older publications: ‘All of my published books will be re-edited to reflect this order in the future’ (Okawa 1996: 142).

22 The change in the subtitles is also evident in the other books of the initial three *hō*-Series: The new *Ōgon no hō* introduces to ‘the view of history of El Cantare’ (*Eru Kantare no rekishikan*), and the new ‘The Laws of Eternity’ (*Eien no hō*) is containing *Eru Kantāre no sekaikan* (‘The worldview of El Cantare’).



sheet *Friday*—highly critical articles were launched which provoked a fierce reaction of the movement. KnK organised big mass demonstrations in front of the *Kōdansha* headquarters which caused the work of the publishing house to stand still for a couple of days. The whole incident opened a series of court trials and litigations which only ended at the beginning of the new millennium. For KnK the events of the year 1991 led to very intensive public work and the participation in a couple of debated media topics of this time. The group participated in and organised various ‘campaigns’ on, for instance, the topics of suicide or pornography with the obvious aim to attract more attention (and probably followers). Ōkawa continued to present himself as the actual representation of the highest spiritual being in further mass events, whilst the perception in the media remained highly critical and negative.<sup>23</sup>

The presentations and big mass events in the public ended in the mid-1990s and the movement retracted in the following years obviously concentrating on the inner organisation. Since 1996 a dense net of buildings was opened across Japan which serve as the main meeting points. They are commonly referred to as *shōja* (‘temple’). Most of them are also called *shōshinkan* (‘Hall of the Right Mind’) whilst additional names are used for particular sites, such as the *Miraikan* (‘Future Hall’) in Utsunomiya<sup>24</sup> or the *Akita Shinkōkan* (‘Akita Faith Hall’) in Yashima, Akita, which was initially called *Monjukan* (‘*Monju Hall*’) and devoted to Ōkawa’s wife, Ōkawa Kyōko (b. 1965), who was said to be an reincarnation of the bodhisattva *Mañjuśrī* (*Monju*).<sup>25</sup>

Although ‘change’ is a constant factor in the movement’s further history, the year 2008, when the new name ‘Happy Science’ was launched, seems to be a major turning point. This becomes also evident in the fact that in the

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23 Reader remarks that the perception of KnK in the first half of the 1990s was even more negative than that of *Ōmu Shinrikyō*, whose leader Asahara Shōkō (b. 1955) was able to attract several exponents of the media with his views (2000: 174).

24 Utsunomiya has a *shōshinkan* and the *Miraikan* and is the place where the very first building was opened. Regarding terminology, officials state that the fact that there is already a major building is the reason why the other must not be labelled a *shōshinkan*.

25 As far as can be seen from the material available, the Ōkawas had severe marital problems in the last years, which resulted in a divorce and an official ‘ban’ on Ōkawa’s wife in 2011. For the text on the ‘eternal ban’ (*eikyū tsuihō*) or ‘excommunication’ (*jomei*), see [http://www.the-liberty.com/article.php?item\\_id=1385](http://www.the-liberty.com/article.php?item_id=1385) (accessed: September 5, 2012). In addition to the ‘violation’ (*ihan*) of the devotion to the three Buddhist treasures and the ‘destruction’ (*hakai*) of the harmony in the priesthood, she is accused of spreading rumours and wrong accusations. In some interviews she gave insight into recent developments regarding the foundation of the political party and said to have been married to the ‘Satan’.

following years Ōkawa tried to re-enter the public scenery. This was done mainly through the foundation of a political party, the ‘Happiness Realisation Party’ (*kōfuku jitsugentō*) which participated in the parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2010. Despite a very intensive campaign the party’s candidates were not able to attain a single seat.

Regarding membership figures (which is always a sensitive issue—not only in the case of new religious movements) there is a wide gap between the official numbers as given by the movement and the estimated number of ‘active’ members. As far as the official declarations are concerned KnK claims to have ten million adherents in Japan since the middle of the 1990s, a number which is still upheld even today but has never been verified. More realistic estimates in the academic literature state figures between 400,000 and 500,000 (Wieczorek 2002: 167) or 100,000 and 300,000 (Reader 2006: 152) in the late 1990s, a number probably declining in the new millennium as it is the case with all the *shin-shinshūkyō* (Prohl 2006: 77). The validity of these estimates was, to a certain extent, confirmed by the results of KnK’s recent attempts to enter the political arena. In the elections for the Lower House (House of Representatives, *shūgiin*) in 2009 the ‘Happiness Realisation Party’ gained 459,387 votes, which is 0.65% of those eligible to vote.<sup>26</sup>

The internationalisation of the movement was a topic already at the beginning of the 1990s. The programme to become a ‘world religion’ (*sekai shūkyō*) was an important feature of the so-called ‘Big Bang’ (*biggu ban*)-plan between 1994 and 1996.<sup>27</sup> Ōkawa describes the preceding period between 1991 and 1993 as ‘Miracle Project’ (*mirakuru keikaku*) with the aim to establish KnK as ‘number one religious organisation in Japan’. Conceived as the movement’s ‘international strategy’ (*kokusai senryaku*), the ‘Big Bang’ project was meant to spread the teachings of KnK to the major cities of the world (Ōkawa 1993: 25). The first international destination became New York in January 1994 which is also the starting point for *KnK USA* (Baffelli 2004: 218). Additional *shibu* (‘branch’), which are responsible for specific ‘regions’ (*chiku*), were established in Los Angeles, Atlanta, San Francisco, Tampa (Florida), New Jersey und Hawai’i,

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26 The official results of the elections 2009 and 2010 are available on the website of the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (*sōmushō*) under [http://www.soumu.go.jp/senkyo/senkyo\\_s/data/shugiin45/index.html](http://www.soumu.go.jp/senkyo/senkyo_s/data/shugiin45/index.html) (accessed: October 22, 2012). The next year, the figure was 229,024 in the elections for the Upper House (House of Councillors, *sangiin*).

27 The slogan used during this time regarding world mission was ‘the flight to world religion’ (*sekai shūkyō e no hishō*) ([Kōfuku no kagaku sōgō honbu] 2001: 44, cf. Ōkawa 1995: 315).

whilst New York remains the *honbu* (‘main office’) of the United States to date. Other international destinations were Toronto, São Paulo, Seoul and Melbourne (Baffelli 2004: 218). According to information given by KnK’s international division in a correspondence with the authors,<sup>28</sup> in recent years the movement has established about 60 *shibu* spanning five continents. In addition, members are counted in more than a hundred countries.

The European centre is London, where a *shibushōja* was established in the second half of the 2000s, which is now in charge of the European mission. Most of the international stations are *shibu*, that is, administrative headquarters, and there are only a few official international *shōja* or temples with further functions. Yet, internationally the terminology ‘temple’ or ‘local temple’ is used also in regard to the *shibu*, supposedly to avoid an expression which is not primarily associated with religious matters (Winter 2010: 110-11). This attitude is only changing in the last years: The first international (and ‘real’) *shōja* was established in Honolulu, Hawai’i, in 2006 and the international spread of *shōja* continued in the following years until today.<sup>29</sup> However, the official numbers regarding the membership outside of Japan, if available, are to be treated cautiously as we have already seen in the case of the official figures for Japan. In the last years, Ōkawa visited several of the movement’s overseas destinations, including, amongst others, Australia, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Singapore, and Uganda. Internationalisation seems to be a major focus of KnK’s endeavours to date.

### 3. The Teachings of Kōfuku no Kagaku in a Nutshell

The description of the historical development given above was to some degree an introduction to main features of the ‘doctrine’ and central ‘system of belief’ as far as this can be determined regarding a movement in its initial stage and in constant reshaping.<sup>30</sup> The current leader and ‘president’ of KnK is regarded as the representation of a spiritual entity which is responsible for Earth and is a part of an elaborate and not fully explained hierarchy of

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28 Exact figures have not been disclosed.

29 A complete and up-to-date list of the international destinations can be found online at <http://www.happy-science.org/en/contact-us> (accessed: October 20, 2012); see also <http://www.happyscience-sf.org/HSAroundTheWorld.html> (accessed: October 20, 2012).

30 See the expression ‘experimental faith’ coined by Douglas E. Cowan and David G. Bromley, which seems to us a very suitable term for religious movements in their ‘birth pangs’ (2008: 227-32).

beings in a multidimensional universe.<sup>31</sup> This is the doctrinal framework which is obviously focussed on the function and the authority of its founder and leader. It is legitimising his status within the movement's hierarchy and he therefrom claims absolute authority on all matters, be it religious, spiritual, organisational, etc. As discussed above this is the result of a specific doctrinal development including major shifts in the way Ōkawa was perceived within the movement.

The doctrine of the four 'principles of happiness' (*kōfuku no genri*) is the nucleus of the teachings which are closely intertwined and presented in the publications as the most important essence of the spiritual world. According to the predominant orientation towards the Buddhist tradition this feature of the movement's teachings is presented as the new version of the (Buddhist) 'four noble truths', namely the 'fourfold path' (*yonshōdō*) which consists of:

- love (*ai*)
- wisdom (*chi*)
- self-reflection (*hansei*)
- progress (*hatten*)

The teachings of 'love' are mainly focussed on a distinction between different forms of love, which are associated with the various 'dimensions' of the universe. The basic distinction is between 'love that takes (away)' (*ubau ai*) and 'love that gives' (*ataeru ai*), the latter being some sort of altruistic ideal which should be internalised and practised by everyone. 'Wisdom' (or 'knowledge') is mainly associated with insight into the teachings of Ōkawa whose authority as the ultimate presentation of the spiritual truth guarantees the truth of this message. 'Self-reflection' is focussed on the constant realisation and adaptation of his principles in daily live, particularly through meditation and constant reflection. The concept of 'progress' is presented as the more or less logical 'consequence' of the aforementioned principles and as some kind of promise for everyone who becomes a member. It is mainly concerned with 'success' (*seikō*) which is the reward for everyone who gets involved in the teachings of Ōkawa. It is success in the context of personal life, which is marriage and family, and also in regard to professional life. The latter topic is of particular importance in many of Ōkawa's publications, which present themselves as

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31 The main argument employed by the group is that Ōkawa has total insight but is not able (or not willing) to reveal 'everything'.

collections of business and management hints and tricks.<sup>32</sup> It is combined with an explicit working ethic in total conformity with the mainstream of Japanese society.<sup>33</sup> Ōkawa stresses the importance of staying within the common guidelines and his approach is based on a primarily optimistic view of the world and the way it works. Being reincarnated, for instance, is not interpreted as a burden but as a chance to move towards a better spiritual position. This is summarised in the following quotation taken from a bilingual introduction to KnK: ‘This world is a superb training ground for spiritual discipline (*tamashii shugyō no ba*). We are born on earth to learn many lessons in life (*jinsei no kyōkun*) and improve our souls (*tamashii o kōjō saseru tame ni*). Life is a workbook of problems to be solved’ ([Kōfuku no kagaku kokusaikyoku] 2008: 65; cf. Okawa 1990: 29). The definition of life as a ‘workbook of problems to be solved’ (*issatsu no mondaishū*) is used throughout the publications from the beginning. The ideal state which shall be the focus of all the member’s endeavours is commonly referred to as *utopia* (*yūtopia*). It is the ideal world where everyone is ‘happy’ thanks to the teachings of Ōkawa.

## 4. The History of Kōfuku no Kagaku in Austria

### 4.1. The Early Beginnings, 1989–1992

Only three years after the inception of KnK in Japan, Ōkawa’s teachings set foot in Austria when a Japanese professional pianist and former adherent of *Seichō no Ie*<sup>34</sup> became the group’s first local member. Kamakura-born Nanako P. (b. 1952) came to Austria in 1976 after graduating from Tōhō Gakuen College in Chōfu, Tōkyō, to continue her studies of piano at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. Raised a staunch Roman Catholic, Nanako P. reminisces that whilst having been exposed to

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Ōkawa 2002.

<sup>33</sup> In functional terms, this is probably the most distinctive difference between KnK and Ōmu Shinrikyō, which were both founded in the middle of the 1980s. The founder of Ōmu Shinrikyō, Asahara Shōkō, called on his followers to become *shukke* (‘those who leave their houses’) and to break with common society.

<sup>34</sup> *Seichō no Ie* is a Japanese new religious movement founded in 1930 by Taniguchi Masaharu (1893–1985), a former member of Shintō-based *Ōmoto*. His doctrine was concerned with dissipating the spiritual gap between humans and the all-embracing divine entity *Seichō no Ie no Ōkami*, rendering the individual aware of his natural godly affinity and bringing him in salvific harmony with the cosmos.

various Buddhist traditions and Shintō beliefs from an early age, she developed an open-minded concern for diverse religions, ultimately leading her to repudiate her Christian faith (Personal Interview: August 22, 2012). In 1986, still on a personal quest for meaning, a friend introduced her to the Vienna chapter of Seichō no Ie, a small group of five or six people, mostly Japanese and Brazilians, who met in a private flat in Vienna's 2nd district. Previous readings of Taniguchi's writings, which nourished a vivid interest for the markedly syncretistic doctrine of Seichō no Ie, made her join the movement quickly. Three years later, however, a fellow co-religionist gave her a copy of *Taniguchi Masaharu reigenshū* (Ōkawa 1987e), a collection of spiritual words by Taniguchi mediumistically delivered by Ōkawa, which, as Nanako P. suggests, marked the starting point of her conversion to the cause of KnK. Intrigued by Ōkawa, who she learned the same year was, reportedly, not only a medium but the reincarnation of the Buddha, she was determined to become part of this 'aspiring' new organisation. Nanako P. contacted the Tōkyō headquarters and received the application materials including the entrance exam (*nyūkaishiken*) by post. She was to take the test consisting of a brief essay and the perusal of a minimum of ten books, with *Taiyō no hō*, *Ōgon no hō*, *Eien no hō* and *Shinsetsu hashshōdō* (Ōkawa 1989b) having been made compulsory readings at this juncture.<sup>35</sup> Returning the materials by letter she was conferred membership by KnK some weeks later. At the time, Nanako P. won over her friend Sonoko S., a student of piano at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna, and colleague at Seichō no Ie, who was also successful in the distance examination. The two were to be the sole active advocates of Ōkawa's thought in Austria for the next three years.<sup>36</sup> In initial years, meetings were held on a non-regular and very informal basis primarily at a flat in Lambrechtgasse in the 4th district, becoming the first permanent rallying point of KnK followers in Austria in subsequent years. Study materials

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35 As Fukui points out, within several years the membership system has undergone a number of alterations, gradually reducing the admission requirements (2004: 134-7). Today, aspirants in Austria ideally need to fill in and sign a one-page application form, purchase the main three prayer books (*kyōmon*)—'Buddha's Teaching: The Dharma of the Right Mind' (*Bussetsu shōshin hōgo*), 'Prayer Book 1' (*Kiganmon 1*) and 'Prayer Book 2' (*Kiganmon 2*)—which are exclusive to members, and perform a short initiation ritual, in which the neophyte pledges devotion to the 'three treasures' (or 'jewels') of Buddhism, that is Buddha, dharma and saṃgha, in front of the *gohonzon*. The *gohonzon* is a sacred icon of worship symbolising aspects of El Cantare or, in the case of a statue, El Cantare himself. Interestingly, on a more informal basis membership status is also internally registered of those merely signing up for the Happy Science mailing list.

36 Sonoko S. returned to Japan in 1993, gradually disassociating herself from the movement.

were scarce and only little by little did the library stock increase mainly owing to donations received and acquisitions made during frequent trips to Japan. The gatherings were unstructured and time was largely spent on, as Nanako P. puts it, ‘amateurish’ meditation (*meisō*) practice and collective study. Neither of the two considered at any time of establishing KnK as a legal entity by incorporating an association (*Verein*), which would have served as an initial organisational platform representing KnK as a religious body on an officially sanctioned level. In fact, the step towards the foundation of an association was made as late as 2010.<sup>37</sup> Early on, Nanako P. and Sonoko S. aimed at connecting with KnK devotees from other European countries. A first convention of European members who have been predominantly, if not exclusively, Japanese at the time was hosted in Munich at the beginning of the 1990s, and proved to be an excellent opportunity for the two Austrian members to get to know and, eventually, strengthen ties with large parts of the European community. These *Idea no kai* termed events were to be staged at irregular intervals (biennially or annually) thereafter, providing an internal forum for social networking, joint prayer and collective study of Ōkawa’s teachings.

#### 4.2. A Time of Consolidation, 1992–1995

Nanako P. and Sonoko S. were not pursuing any distinct mission agenda and only slowly commenced to spread the word among Japanese friends and acquaintances. In March 1992, finally, the small Austrian group welcomed a new member, Hiroyuki I. (b. 1962), who was introduced to Nanako P. and Sonoko S. one month prior by a mutual friend, and would turn into an ardent proponent of Ōkawa’s doctrine and the leading figure of the Austrian movement in the years ahead. Hiroyuki I., born and bred in Kagoshima, completed his vocal studies at Sakuyō College for Music (now Kurashiki Sakuyō University) in Kurashiki, Okayama. In 1990, he came to Vienna and graduated at the University of Music and Performing Arts in 1995 in the fields of opera, lied and oratorio. In 1999, Hiroyuki I. joined the Vienna State Opera Chorus full-time, which would result in handing over major administrative duties to his wife. His passion for music has gone

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<sup>37</sup> Long-term members of KnK mentioned in personal interviews that they have been unaware of such legal procedures throughout the years, which could translate that registering as a religion was deemed largely unnecessary. Surprisingly, the move to create a corporate body, that is the first step for recognition as a religion by the authorities according to Austrian religious law, was prompted by the Japanese headquarters in conjunction with the official opening of a local *shibu* in 2009.

along with a keen interest for spirituality—having him, for example, temporarily associate with *Seiseikōrinkai*<sup>38</sup> and esoteric literature, making him already familiar with some of Ōkawa’s best-selling *reigen* publications before his relocation to Austria. On meeting Nanako P. and Sonoko S. in Vienna, Hiroyuki I. remembers to have obtained copies of *Ōgon no hō*, *Eien no hō* and *Taiyō no hō*. Reading *Taiyō no hō* he compared with an epiphanic realisation,<sup>39</sup> for only a ‘Buddha or an even more advanced being could reveal such truth’ (Personal Interview: September 7, 2012). These striking insights into the nature of being and the universe as exposed by Ōkawa have been the cause for his thorough commitment to KnK hereafter. Prior to officially entering the group, Hiroyuki I. had to ‘pass’ a now minimised admission exam, that is drafting a brief essay on his ambitions as a future member. The text was sent out for evaluation by an external reader in the Tōkyō headquarters; however, at the time this was already viewed as a mere formality, which was to be abolished on an obligatory level several years later. The still small circle of KnK followers was to expand yet another time in early 1992 when a Japanese couple, Masahiro and Yukari K., both expatriate pianists and students of music, learnt of Ōkawa via Nanako P. and Hiroyuki I. Having increased to five members, meetings were henceforth held more regularly, that is weekly or fortnightly, in the apartment of Nanako P. in Lambrechtgasse, but continued to be largely unstructured with a focus on collective study and discussion, chiefly based on the monthly magazine (*gekkanshi*) *Kōfuku no kagaku*,<sup>40</sup> as well as watching inspiring video recordings of Ōkawa’s lectures. Returning from the second *Idea no kai* European seminar in Amsterdam in April 1992, the Austrian group’s missionary activities gathered some pace, albeit still limited to the Japanese community. Books and tape recordings of ‘the Master’<sup>41</sup> (*sensei*) were distributed for free among friends and colleagues,<sup>42</sup>

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38 Seiseikōrinkai is a Japanese new religious movement founded by Yashima Yoshirō (1914–2010) in 1965 known for its emphasis on spiritual healing.

39 Senior members of the Austrian group indicated that the *Taiyō no hō* and the prayer books, with *Buddha’s Teaching: The Dharma of the Right Mind* in particular, are considered to be most crucial.

40 The Japanese edition was launched in 1987 (308) and the English edition with its current title *Happy Science Monthly* in 1994 (223). The German edition *Happy Science Heft* appeared intermittently between 2008 and 2010 (14). The figure within brackets indicates the total number of issues as of October 2012. The monthly is the most popular among several magazines published by KnK, containing member testimonies or experience stories (*taikendan*), lectures of Ōkawa, international news and the like.

41 Austrian members refer to Ōkawa as ‘Master’ (*Meister*), whilst Japanese believers in addition use the title *sōsai sensei* (‘President-Teacher’).



and Nanako P., encouraged by Masahiro K., who took the organisational reins of the group, set up a miniature open access library for esoteric literature in her flat, running on scattered weekends and welcoming anyone interested to study or simply enjoy company (Personal Interview with Nanako P: October 28, 2012). In spite of promoting the event in the newsletter (*wīn no kaze*) of the ‘Austrian Japanese Society’ (*ōsutoria nihonjinkai*), the initiative turned out to be for the most part unsuccessful and was, as a consequence, abandoned after a while. Between 1992 and 1996, a few members of the group volunteered for KnK’s publishing company ‘IRH Press’ (*kōfuku no kagaku shuppan*) at the Frankfurt Book Fair, which represents the first notable contribution of the Austrian movement to KnK’s international agenda. Starting with the first *Idea no kai*, inner-European contacts with other KnK practitioners consolidated incrementally, which is why the Austrian group, having been reduced in the meanwhile to four core members due to the return of Sonoko S. to Japan,<sup>43</sup> could host an informal get-together of some 15 Japanese members invited from several European countries in Lambrechtgasse in 1994. In January 1995, Hiroyuki I. met his future wife, Megumi (b. 1962), who after joining the movement in May 1995 would play a vital role in the further development of KnK in Austria.

### 4.3. A Small Leap Forward, 1995–2001

Megumi I. was born in Sapporo and graduated in German Studies from Dokkyō University in Sōka, Saitama. After a brief sojourn in Vienna in

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42 Missionary work of the Austrian group was and still is almost without exception confined to the members’ circle of relatives and acquaintances. This is in line with main recruitment processes of most Japanese new religious movements (Reader 1991: 199) and, in particular, KnK’s general mission strategy, which is circulated among more experienced members in seminars and trainings. Only in recent years with the new *shibu* being opened in Zentagasse 40-42 in the 5th district in 2009, but yet very rarely, strangers were approached when handing out information materials on the streets, mostly in the vicinity of the *shibu*, or during various fairs, the latter becoming the most successful venue for proselytising (*dendō*). Being asked why brochures or pamphlets are not disseminated publicly, current Japanese members of the Austrian group pointed out that they would actually not belong to a ‘cult’ (*karuto*). For non-Japanese members, proselytising in general is a highly controversial subject, which will be touched upon briefly in section 4.5.

43 The inner circle of KnK in Austria remained marginal at all times, never exceeding five or six members. Over the first ten years, a small number of fellow travellers, Japanese only, entered the group but would never stay on for long.

1983, she fully relocated to Austria in the summer of 1985, continuing her studies of German at private language schools in Vienna. Her strong inclination for music had her learn piano and vocals, which, in retrospect, she deems the driving motive for moving to Austria in the first place (Personal Interview: August 14, 2012). From 1991 onwards she worked as a part-time interpreter for a Japanese musical college and held various occasional jobs drawing on her language expertise. Megumi I. was raised in a predominantly Buddhist environment but describes herself as having been without any particular religious affiliation, whilst showing some sensitivity towards religion in general (Personal Interview: August 14, 2012). She was introduced to Ōkawa and KnK through her future husband in early 1995. Listening to an audio record of *Shinrigaku yōron* (Ōkawa 1990) and watching video tapes of Ōkawa's talks aroused an incipient interest, especially concerning the concept of love (*ai*); however, at first she remained reluctant to join the group but,<sup>44</sup> ultimately, complied with her partner's wishes, becoming an energetic exponent of Austrian KnK in later years.<sup>45</sup> Shortly thereafter, Masahiro and Yukari K. returned to Japan,

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44 She reported in a personal interview (August 20, 2012) that her initial restraint was provoked by a feeling of apprehension with respect to new religious movements, such as Ōmu Shinrikyō, *Sōka Gakkai* and *Tōitsu Kyōkai*, that is, the Korean Unification movement, which have been particularly notorious in the Japanese media. Interestingly, the members of the Austrian group endorse the public tenor that is pointedly directed against new religious movements, yet implicitly excluding KnK, which is regarded as markedly different and thus must not be compared with any sort of 'cult'. This is also in accordance with KnK's general attitude towards its main competitors on the religious market: Whilst the *sekai shūkyō* ('world religions') are said not to be in conflict with its teachings ([Kōfuku no kagaku kokusaikyoku] 2008: 55), the group fiercely attacked prominent examples of new religious movements during several campaigns in the first half of the 1990s (Winter 2012: 97-8).

45 Before taking up membership, she was asked to write a brief essay based on the *Taiyō no hō*, which was sent to the European headquarters (*yōroppa shibu*) in London for evaluation. The London *shibu* was opened in 1994 and was to administer the European mission. Thenceforward, any formal correspondence was to be directed to London in lieu of Tōkyō. In 2008, until the Vienna-based group has been granted to establish a *shibu* by the Japanese headquarters in June 2009, Austrian KnK came under the organisational authority of the German *shibu* in Düsseldorf, which was responsible for the German speaking area. The *shibu* in Düsseldorf (Klosterstraße 112) was shut down and is now replaced by the *shibu* in Berlin (Akazienstraße 27). When being asked for the rationale behind the entrance exams, Megumi I. gave credit to the main narrative upheld by KnK (Personal interview: August 20, 2012), indicating that the movement set out as a mere study group with the intention to address people with a clear mind who would strive to internalise the depth of Ōkawa's teachings, as opposed to an organisation aiming at expanding uncontrolledly without creating a firm foundation. Since the mid-90s, Ōkawa was resolved to have KnK take the global lead in saving humankind. Hence, he called for

slimming down the group to a mere three members, Nanako P., Hiroyuki I. and Megumi I. With Masahiro K. leaving, Hiroyuki I. assumed the position of semi-official leader of Austrian KnK,<sup>46</sup> a role he would retain until 2009. The couple married in September 1995 and moved into a flat in Hietzinger Kai in Vienna’s 13th district. This was a welcome opportunity to transfer the group’s regular meeting site from Lambrechtgasse. For the next 13 years, members would assemble in the home of Hiroyuki I. and Megumi I., first in Hietzinger Kai, from 1999 until 2002 in Jakschgasse in Vienna’s 14th district, and, finally, between 2002 and 2008 in Kohlsgasse in the 5th district. For business or private matters, Hiroyuki I., Megumi I. and Nanako P. have been frequently travelling to Japan between once and five or six times a year. With the establishment of the first *shōja* in August 1996 in Utsunomiya, Tochigi, the members would start to regularly visit sacred KnK sites and attend a variety of seminars whilst in Japan.<sup>47</sup> In the period that followed, the Austrian group—or more precisely Hiroyuki I.—received a first *gohonzon* from the London *shibu* and, in 1998, launched an initiative to translate the prayer books into German.<sup>48</sup> The number of members increased from three to five when two Japanese musicians, Yūko M. (1996, vocalist) and Midori S. (1997, pianist), who have been privately approached by Hiroyuki I., joined the group.<sup>49</sup> The structure of the meetings, usually

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a rapid internationalisation of his novel faith, eventually, easing and in the mid-90s terminating the practice of admission tests.

46 Hiroyuki I. was the local representative (*chikuchō*) and official voice of the Austrian group but has not been formally instituted by the Japanese headquarters. When opening a formally authorised national *kyoten* (‘base’) in an apartment in Arbeitergasse 19 in Vienna’s 5th district in autumn 2008, he became *kyotenchō* (‘head of base’).

47 These study trips are self-financed and the learners can opt from a variety of seminar offerings in Japanese, ranging from meditation over mission to business courses. Twice a year (usually scheduled in spring and autumn) members not proficient in Japanese can attend a ‘retreat’ programme, that is a series of seminars held in English, at a *shōja* in Japan.

48 Current members may also purchase (or ‘donate for’) a small fold-away *gohonzon*.

49 Midori S. returned to Japan a couple of years later, whilst Yūko M. became the fourth long-term member of Austrian KnK who is still active as of 2012. Born in Tsu, Mie prefecture, into a family of Pure Land Buddhist (Jōdo-shū) faith, Yūko M. spent six years at a Catholic school, making her familiar with the Christian faith and eliciting growing interest in spirituality and philosophy. Graduating from prestigious Musashino Music University in Tōkyō, she came to Austria in 1989 to deepen her vocal studies at Prayner Conservatory for Music and Dramatic Arts in Vienna. Working with the Vienna State Opera Chorus, she met Hiroyuki I. in 1996 who introduced her to the teachings of KnK. In a personal interview (October 30, 2012), Yūko M. reports that her year-long search for meaning finally came to an end when reading a copy of *Taiyō no hō* and, especially, *Fudōshin* (1997a) and *Hito o aishi, hito o ikashi, hito o yuruse* (1997b), to

held for two hours at least biweekly, was not subject to any provisions and remained to some degree loose, typically comprising an initial joint loud prayer (*oinori*) of approximately ten minutes,<sup>50</sup> followed by brief meditation and the main study part, which could be based upon reading and discussion of the movement's monthly magazine *Kōfuku no kagaku*, collective study and discussion of a previously selected key theme pertaining to one of Ōkawa's books, or watching a recent lecture delivered by Ōkawa.<sup>51</sup> The Austrian group witnessed some major developments in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Succeeding European branch leaders (*yōroppa shibuchō*)—Uchimura Yasunari and Igata Takashi—from the London *shibu* started to regularly visit Vienna for small-scale seminars two to four times per year.<sup>52</sup> In the summer of 1999, the Austrian group hosted a large two-day seminar entitled *Eien no hō* ('Laws of Eternity') under the tutelage of Igata Takashi at the Rudolf Steiner School in Geymüllergasse 1 in Vienna's 18th district. Around forty to fifty people, mostly KnK members from across Europe but also two guests from Japan and a few scattered local visitors, participated in

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which she attributes particular relevance. In spite of her natural diffidence, having her kept in distance to institutionalised religions before, she quickly joined KnK. For Yūko M., the concept of 'love that gives' (*ataeru ai*), which entails utmost 'self-sacrifice unparalleled by other religious doctrines', is the most distinct feature of Ōkawa's teachings.

50 Generally, the members would recite the prayers in the following order: 'Words of Truth: The Dharma of the Right Mind' (*shinri no kotoba: shōshin hōgo*), 'Prayer to the Lord' (*shu e no inori*) and 'Prayer to Guardian and Guiding Spirits' (*shugo shidōrei e no inori*). These three prayers are considered of key importance by Japanese and non-Japanese members of Austrian KnK alike. Consequently, they are included in the so-called 'Admission Edition of the Dharma of the Right Mind' (*nyūkaiban: shōshin hōgo*)—the English edition is slightly abbreviated to 'The Dharma of the Right Mind' (German edition: *Dharma der rechten Gesinnung*)—a small prayer booklet accessible by and distributed to non-members.

51 Video tapes of Ōkawa's sermons were distributed via the European headquarters in London. In personal conversations, Japanese members of the Austrian group spotlighted that the meetings also involved discussions of personal problems, occasionally addressed by members, against the backdrop of Ōkawa's teachings. This nicely mirrors a common and popular practice among numerous Japanese new religious movements with neo-Buddhist groups in particular, and connects to what Shimazono calls 'experientialism' (2004: 85ff). Surprisingly, this experiential approach is not applied in current meetings of non-Japanese members of the Austrian group headed by Megumi I., indicating the volatility of this segment of members; a topic which shall be outlined further below.

52 Megumi I. mentioned in a personal interview (August 14, 2012) that this increase of activities but also the visitor's charisma might have been expediting the subsequent growth of the Austrian group.

the event.<sup>53</sup> A similar event, this time largely addressing a non-Japanese audience, was staged two years later, in November 2001, at Hotel Europahaus in Linzer Straße 429 in Vienna’s 14th district. 40 or so people attended the two-day seminar guided by European branch chief Takayoshi Takagi on the *Taiyō no hō* and KnK’s fourfold path. In between these two international seminars starting in 1999, the Austrian group recruited its first non-Japanese local members,<sup>54</sup> the majority of whose have been musicians or music enthusiasts and of slightly mixed national background. Next to a number of professional vocalists, members held different occupations, including, amongst others, a make-up artist, an actress, a clerk and a nurse. In terms of gender composition, the new members were in line with the Japanese nucleus of Austrian KnK, with a superior number of female adherents, a fact remaining unchanged up to the present. Ultimately, the rise in membership came to an end in 2001, the group totalling around a dozen of more or less active members, and began to decline thereafter. Ideally, gatherings were organised every fortnight in accordance with the structuring of previous years, that is, an initial prayer session—conducted in Japanese or German—followed by meditation practice—on which the non-Japanese members put particular stress wherefore it has been extended—and study and discussion.<sup>55</sup> At the ‘zenith’ of the group’s first expansion, two Austrian members even travelled to Japan, attending KnK seminars and visiting the Tōkyō headquarters and various temples. With the inflow of non-Japanese members, the Japanese adherents decided to run additional Japanese-only meetings, an initiative resumed in recent years but not countenanced by all non-Japanese followers. The fulcrum of Japanese-Austrian member interaction was and still is Megumi I.

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53 The seminar comprising meditation and study workshops including discussion groups, primarily targeted at a Japanese audience; accordingly, the main language was Japanese. However, some interpreting was provided for non-Japanese attendants. Prior to the seminar, pamphlets have been handed out nearby the venue to attract locals.

54 The new members have been introduced by existing Japanese members whom they knew personally mainly from a work-related context.

55 Due to the lack of German translations, study materials in English have been used before German translations have been made available. In fact, Austrian KnK was central in having key texts edited and translated into German. Moreover, in most cases a Graz-based professional translator helped to create sound German translations on the basis of both the Japanese original and the English translation. See *Der Ursprung des Glücks* (Okawa 2003a) based on *Kōfuku no genten* (Ōkawa 1988b), *Die unerschütterliche Gesinnung* (2003b), based on *Fudōshin* (Ōkawa 1997a), *Liebe die Menschen, inspiriere sie und vergib ihnen* (Okawa 2003c), based on *Hito o aishi, hito o ikashi, hito o yursue* (Ōkawa 1997b), and *Der Ursprung der Liebe* (Okawa 2005), based on *Ai no genten* (Ōkawa 2001), and *Das Gesetz der Sonne* (Okawa 2001), translated from *Taiyō no hō* (Ōkawa 2000).

#### 4.4. Crisis and Revitalisation, 2002–2009

Those entering the group between 1999 and 2001 were, if not becoming completely inactive at some point earlier, to leave gradually over the next years,<sup>56</sup> thus reducing the member count to a modest four to five followers, basically represented by the long-term Japanese adherents. In the same vein, meetings of the Japanese core group became less and less frequent, in particular when some members had to face a period of great calamity between around 2003 and 2007,<sup>57</sup> involving private problems and health issues, which virtually paralysed any kind of joint group activities and thus proselytising in general. The tense situation eased from 2007 onwards, which is, amongst others, reflected by the formation of ‘Angel Wings’, a music group launched by the remaining members with the intent to bring solace (*iyashi*) and happiness (*kōfuku*) to the people through music.<sup>58</sup> In previous years, the group performed infrequently, usually for the sole purposes of KnK events or meetings. The missionary work amid friends and colleagues was slowly revived and guest lecturers were again invited from London and also the *shibu* in Düsseldorf and, subsequently, Berlin to offer seminars that have been attracting at best about 15 people, many of which were given introductory readings such as *Dharma der rechten Gesinnung* to pique further interest. A few participants effectively stayed in touch, however, barely developing a close relationship with the group, let alone gaining more than a faint grasp of the teachings of Ōkawa and, especially, the salvific role of El Cantare. Along the way, the group started to advertise larger events in the *Wiener Bezirkszeitung*, a biweekly (and since 2009 weekly) district newspaper, and on very rare occasions in national daily newspapers including *Die Presse* and *Kurier*. The public response fell short of expectations and fee-based advertising was to be discontinued after a while. Instead, which has been retained for the time being, announcements were run free of charge, in *Bewusst Sein*, a Vienna-based monthly esoteric magazine, and more recently (2012) in the online version of the *Wiener Bezirkszeitung* as well as other internet portals. In autumn 2008, Austrian

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<sup>56</sup> In personal conversation, Japanese members highlighted that Austrian members would enjoy collective prayer and meditation whilst largely ignoring textual studies concerning Ōkawa’s thought. Hence, they would not receive profound insights by the Japanese followers into the doctrine of KnK, including the true nature of Ōkawa as a hypostatisation of El Cantare.

<sup>57</sup> Megumi I., the current branch leader of Austrian KnK, remarked that this troublesome time had been a veritable trial for some members, resulting in a more assured faith (Personal Interview: August 14, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> <http://engelsfluegeln.web.fc2.com/topjp.html> (accessed: October 16, 2012).

KnK was granted the status of *kyoten* for a new facility in Arbeitergasse. Henceforth, the apartment provided the venue for meetings and replaced the former ‘centre’ in a private flat in nearby Kohlgasse. This has not only been the first time that Austrian KnK owned discrete premises for the sole purpose of religious ‘day-to-day business’, but also that it gained financial support pertaining to infrastructural measures from its parent organisation. The rent payment was settled by the Düsseldorf *shibu* that became responsible for administering the mission across the whole German-speaking area, including Austria, Germany and Switzerland.<sup>59</sup> Having been a longstanding part of the international KnK community and, more importantly, reporting a rising membership, in mid-2009 the Japanese headquarters finally conceded to have the Austrian group institute its own *shibu*, thereby approving its status as an autonomous administrative entity and as such endorsing a direct line of communication with Tōkyō.<sup>60</sup> In view of the upcoming changes, Hiroyuki I. stepped down as national leader and was succeeded by his spouse, Megumi, who was formally appointed *zaike shibuchō* (‘lay branch leader’) and,<sup>61</sup> accordingly, became head of *Happy Science Österreich – Institut für Glücksforschung* (‘Happy Science Austria – Institute for Research of Happiness’).<sup>62</sup> By October 2009, the Austrian group reported 35 members, a number to be officially almost octupled within the next three years.<sup>63</sup> Preparing for the opening ceremony of the

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59 In May 2008, a ‘centre’ was inaugurated in Zurich (Luchswiesenstrasse 191) but was closed soon thereafter. The main contact of the current Swiss branch is located in Luzern (Neustadtstrasse 7).

60 Each month, the branch leaders have to report on the latest activities, proselytising, internal developments and the progress (or possibly the regress) made by individual members. Related news were hitherto informally collected by the German and, prior to that, the British *shibu* and included in their monthly reports, respectively.

61 Formally, other than the *shibuchō*, a *zaike shibuchō* is not employed by KnK.

62 Concerning official naming, the Austrian group tried for consistency with its Japanese parent organisation. It thus appeared as *Das Institut zur Erforschung des menschlichen Glücks* (The Institute for Research in Human Happiness) prior to 2008. See footnote 1. Current Austrian members are using the English designation ‘Happy Science’ in lieu of the German rendering ‘Glückliche Wissenschaft’.

63 Member statistics provided by the Austrian group are in keeping with the aforementioned general propensity of KnK for overstating membership figures. In fact, no clear-cut regulation is enforced ascertaining how to calculate the memberships. Of the actual 35 followers, around one-third has been more or less active by that time. As a rule, if someone, no longer interested in the various (religious, cultural, social) offerings of the group, does not explicitly declare withdrawal, he or she is kept in the records. More than 25 years ago, Hardacre already referred to a tendency of Japanese new religious movements to rethink applied measurements by drawing on membership dues received to calculate more exact numbers (1986: 4). However, aside from the fact that many movements still do not employ definite criteria, this would not be feasible for Austrian

*shibu* in Zentagasse 40-42 on 21 November 2009, the group launched its website [www.hs-austria.org](http://www.hs-austria.org), since then the major source of information for members and the general public alike. In early November, the group participated in *Esoterik Tage 2009* ('Esoteric Days 2009'), a three-day fair taking place at Wiener Stadthalle, Austria's most notable venue for large-scale events. Up to the present, Austrian KnK has been continuing to exhibit at a number of fairs in and around Vienna, including *Spa, Health & Beauty Messe* (February 2010), the biannually hosted *Esoterik Tage* (May and November), *Wellness & Lifestyle Messe* (September 2011) and *Luna – Messe für Bewusstsein und Gesundheit* ('Luna – Consciousness and Health Fair', October 2012), mainly selling or freely distributing books by Ōkawa, internal magazines, KnK prayer books, and meditational music, produced by KnK in Japan, with high hopes for attracting a larger audience.<sup>64</sup> By opening the *shibu*, Austrian KnK has entered a relatively vibrant new era, characterised by a wide array of activities, extending from lectures and seminars on key KnK issues over Japanese language courses to a sushi cooking class.<sup>65</sup>

#### 4.5. New Horizons, 2009–2012

Being the branch chief and at the same time the group's only full-time equivalent, albeit working in a voluntary capacity, Megumi I., is more than ever the organisational centrepiece of KnK Austria, engaged in arranging a

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KnK inasmuch as fees or 'donations' are not claimed mandatorily from the believers. For the Austrian group, this effectively means that only the Japanese adherents contribute in pecuniary terms.

<sup>64</sup> The comparatively rapid rise in 'membership'—Austrian KnK reports 270 as of September 2012—is indeed tightly linked to the movement's participation in various fairs. It attributes this to the fact that visitors, leaving their name or e-mail address during KnK events or, more importantly, the fairs, are right away listed as new members. However that may be, several of the 'members' so proselytised actually stay on. Remarkably, contact with most (at some point) active non-Japanese members has been initially established during a fair. Even so, Megumi I. indicates that the majority of people becoming more involved with KnK via fairs is much more likely to be exclusively interested in KnK ritual practice (prayer and meditation), whilst disregarding a more sophisticated study of Ōkawa's teachings. It would seem that large parts of the clientele encountered at esoteric fairs are using KnK primarily as a temporary supplement in a personal quest for spiritual cultivation (Personal Interview with Megumi I: August 20, 2012).

<sup>65</sup> Other offerings include, *inter alia*, meditation lessons, screenings of KnK film productions and Ōkawa's lectures, performances of 'Angel Wings', readings, a flea market, and prayer meetings.



broad range of weekly activities. Themed meditation sessions<sup>66</sup> and study seminars or lectures conducted by Japanese members or invited KnK dignitaries, including, for example, current European branch leader Albena Simeonova (b. 1966) and her predecessor Ichikura Yōichi, occupy a prioritised part in the group’s event schedule since November 2009. In accordance with Ōkawa’s own doctrinal emphasis, the seminars and lectures focus largely on three inter-related areas—happiness, healing and success in daily life,<sup>67</sup> embedded in a mixed Buddhist and esoteric narrative.<sup>68</sup> Notwithstanding the variegated assortment of activities, the public outreach is very limited with an average of no more than five people in attendance for ordinary gatherings. Running separate meetings on Thursdays, other Japanese members only occasionally join in the general meetings which are in principal slated for a non-Japanese audience. For the most part, regular events are not subject to charge but, needless to say, donations are always very welcome. Fees are normally required to participate in special seminars, such as the ‘qualifications seminars’ (*shikaku seminā*), having been arranged on three weekends in October 2011, February 2012 and March 2012. These seminars, offered at elementary level (*shokyū seminā*), intermediate level (*chūkyū seminā*) and advanced level (*jōkyū seminā*), being concluded by an exam paper, shall provide a non-committal opportunity for members to deepen their learning of Ōkawa’s teachings.<sup>69</sup> As a general policy, the first-level exam may be taken anytime, whilst intermediate and advanced level exams are to be offered once a year. Alongside the qualifications seminars, members who are eager to test their knowledge of Ōkawa’s works or aspire to a formal

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66 To name a few: ‘Angel Meditation’ (*Engel Meditation*), ‘Four-Stage Meditation’ (*Vierstufen Meditation*) or ‘Meditation of Light’ (*Meditation des Lichts*).

67 A manifestation of the pursuit of *genze riyaku* (‘this-worldly benefits’) (Reader and Tanabe 1998), this triad represents a central theme of most Japanese new religious movements.

68 Recurring topics are ‘love’, ‘karma’, ‘reflection’, ‘the eightfold path’, or aspects of KnK’s idiosyncratic historiography. For the latter see, for example, Schrimpf 2008.

69 The seminar series in 2011 and 2012 was the first time ever that non-Japanese members of Austrian KnK took the licensing tests. Two of them, Maria E. (b. 1942) and Ursula F. (b. 1959), now hold the advanced level certificate. The seminars and tests in Vienna were held by a ‘priest’, Lithuanian Rasa Norvaišaitė, in English. First-stage religious functionaries called ‘research fellows’ (*kenkyūin*) who are in paid employment at KnK are commonly referred to as ‘priests’ (*Priester*) by Austrian members. Higher-ranking members are usually called ‘senior priests’ (*Oberpriester*) whatever their actual Japanese functional title is. Becoming a *kenkyūin* marks the final qualification for ordinary followers, whilst employed members may progress further within the internal hierarchy. Hiroyuki I. and his wife Megumi are the only current members of the Austrian group having obtained the title of *kenkyūin*.

position within KnK may also sit the annual ‘National Study of the Truth of Buddha’s Teachings Examination’ (*zenkoku buppō shinrigaku kentei shiken*), to date held only in Japanese. With the *shibu* in place and a directive by the Japanese headquarters in hand, Austrian KnK submitted an application for building an association (*Verein*) in June 2010. The announcement was subsequently approved by the federal police headquarters in Vienna (*Bundespolizeidirektion Wien*) on 16 July 2010. The association with its programmatic name ‘Happy Science Austria – Association for the Promotion and Attainment of Trust, Love, Enlightenment and for the Creation of Utopia’ (*Happy Science Österreich – Verein zur Förderung und Erlangung von Vertrauen, Erleuchtung und zur Erschaffung von Utopia*) is represented by Ichikawa Kazuhiro (chairman), who serves as the director of the KnK international office (*kokusai kyokuchō*) in Japan, and Megumi I. (secretary), the Austrian branch leader. The association statutes clarify the purpose of the association:

- (1) Purpose of the association is the promotion of the religion of Happy Science and the familiarisation of the general public with this religion. The religion of Happy Science is a teaching of faith in love, wisdom, self-reflection and progress in accordance with the teachings of the founder of Happy Science, Master Ryuho Okawa. The association promotes the teachings of the public corporation ‘Kofuku-no-Kagaku’ (Science of Happiness), founded in Japan by Mr Ryuho Okawa.<sup>70</sup>
- (2) Purpose of the association is to equally participate in charitable activities and to help people in need through participation in social and humanitarian activities for the support of families, elderly people, children, the youth, and everyone in need of help.<sup>71</sup>

Item 1 indicates the movement’s foremost aim to promulgate the teachings of Ōkawa; however, the subject of proselytising has always been hotly debated among non-Japanese members. The year 2012, in particular, has witnessed serious frictions when members, attending a qualifications

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70 ‘(1) Zweck des Vereins ist die Förderung der Happy Science Religion und die Bekannt-machung der Allgemeinheit mit dieser Religion. Die Happy Science Religion ist eine Lehre über den Glauben an Liebe, Weisheit, Selbstreflektion [*sic*] und Fortschritt gemäß der Lehre des Gründers von Happy Science, Master [*sic*] Ryuho Okawa. Der Verein fördert die Lehre der in Japan von Herrn Ryuho Okawa gegründeten öffentlichen Körperschaft “Kofuku-no-Kagaku” (Wissenschaft des Glücks).’

71 ‘(2) Zweck des Vereins ist gleichfalls an charitativen Aktivitäten mitzuwirken und hilfsbedürftigen Menschen zu helfen durch Teilnahme an sozialen und humanitären Aktivitäten zur Unterstützung von Familien, älteren Menschen, Kindern, der Jugend und jedem, der Hilfe benötigt.’

seminar, were introduced to KnK’s guidelines for missionary work and, concomitantly, requested to actively spread the faith. Members displayed vehement irritation, resulting in collective uneasiness and resignation (Personal interviews with non-Japanese members of Austrian KnK), which ever since made even the slightest attempt by the Japanese members directed at KnK’s mission agenda futile. Consequently and in compliance with past developments, the Austrian group’s proselytism today is to a great extent based on the Japanese members, and especially, the assiduity of Megumi I. Effectively, less than twenty out of (largely inactive) 270 reported members are, in varying degrees, committed to KnK’s millenarian vision, and no more than half of those take refuge in El Cantare instead of the Buddha.<sup>72</sup> To put it another way, only a handful of members do cherish a belief in KnK key teachings centred upon the genuine role of El Cantare. Revealing the true identity of Ōkawa is considered the final disclosure and, admittedly, the most sensitive and delicate issue in the entire conversion process. In many cases this entails sceptical and indignant responses, leading members to distance themselves from the group or to leave straightaway. Others, involving the majority of active non-Japanese members, simply ignore or downsize the relevance of this part of KnK’s dogmatics. As a result, Austrian members today are even more cautiously introduced to Ōkawa’s ‘real nature’.

From websites and internal publications, the Austrian movement, if at all, is known to be one among just a few local groups spearheading the faith in El Cantare in Europe.<sup>73</sup> With the life story of an Austrian member (Ursula F.) published in the English edition of *Happy Science Monthly* in December 2010 (*Happy Science* 2010: 6-13),<sup>74</sup> it seems that Austrian KnK has again, for the first time in years, very briefly entered the ‘spotlight’ of

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72 This is also mirrored by the financial situation and fundraising activities of KnK Austria. It is the Japanese members only who are donating larger sums every month to be mainly collected by the Japanese headquarters. In addition, members need to ‘donate’ for DVDs of Ōkawa’s lectures and holding prayer ceremonies (*kigansai*). Meagre profit of Austrian KnK is yielded solely on the basis of selling books, which are ordered for free by the branch chief, and fee-based events. Half of the operating costs of the *shibu* are covered by the Japanese parent organisation with the remaining costs fed by donations of the Japanese members.

73 As of 2012, other more or less active official European branches encompass the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Bulgaria, Finland and Switzerland.

74 Each issue of *Happy Science Monthly* features prominently a member experience story, exemplarily portraying the beneficial impact of Ōkawa’s teachings on the life of the adherent. In this particular case, the member’s pondering on her childhood grief is tied to her journey to KnK sites in Japan in summer 2010. Accompanied by Austrian branch leader Megumi I., Ursula F. was the first non-Japanese member of the Austrian group in ten years to visit KnK temples in Japan.

the international community. In terms of networking, the Austrian group is still relatively engaged, pursuing frequent contacts with the German and in particular the Tōkyō headquarters. Proselytising and therefore an effective growth in membership,<sup>75</sup> however, still proves to be more difficult than expected after opening the *shibu* in 2009. Nevertheless, driven by KnK salvational promises,<sup>76</sup> initial ambitions and goals of core members, such as the construction of a self-funded temple (*shibushōja*), a membership of 500-1000 devout believers and the spread to federal capital cities like Salzburg, Graz or Innsbruck, remain unabated.

## 5. Member Profiles

Whilst Austrian KnK holds a relatively stable basis of active Japanese adherents, the affiliation number of non-Japanese followers is noticeably ephemeral, with a broad qualitative spectrum of those counted as ‘members’ concerning involvement in religious activities and actual affinity to the doctrine at large. Throughout the interview period from August to November 2012, Japanese members have indicated varying numbers of non-Japanese ‘core’—that is, allegedly ‘most dedicated’—members, a fact highlighting the general vicissitude of the non-Japanese clientele. Notwithstanding the unsteadiness of ‘member commitment’, a glimpse at (more or less) active current non-Japanese members unfolds a common religious trajectory firmly grounded in a mindset informed by esoteric knowledge and the longing for ‘spiritual’ transformation. Serving as a supplement to the previous discussion inasmuch as it adumbrates a general (religious) profile of the current non-Japanese membership, this section shall succinctly introduce four adherents who have been more actively participating in community life of Austrian KnK in previous years. The semi-structured guided interviews have been conducted on September 7, 2012 (Maria E., Ursula F.), October 28, 2012 (Barbara F.) and October 31, 2012 (Mark).

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<sup>75</sup> Throughout the years, it has been the Japanese (core) members who effectively made up Austrian KnK. As of November 2012, active Japanese members include Hiroyuki and Megumi I., Yūko M., Nanako P. and Kazuko K. (b. 1981, vocalist), who joined the group via Yūko M. in 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Being asked about the reason for proselytising, Megumi I. stated that the doctrine of KnK is potentially capable of uniting all religions. It basically relies on ancient knowledge adapted to contemporary needs and possessing the power to save humans by enabling them to overcome spiritual blindness and achieve utmost happiness (Personal Interview: August 14, 2012).

Maria E., born into a family of German descent in Western Romania, and educated as a violinist in Bucharest, came to Germany in 1970 where she worked with several city orchestras until her retirement in 2002 when she moved to Vienna. She was introduced to KnK in January 2010 at a seminar on karma, advertised in the *Wiener Bezirkszeitung* and organised by Megumi I. at the *shibu* in Zentagasse. Maria E. joined the movement in December 2010. Having a Catholic upbringing, she turned into a convinced atheist as an adolescent. Having said this, she was to develop an increasing fascination for spiritual teachings and practice in later years. A number of encounters had lasting impact on her spiritual ripening, such as psychic surgeries performed by a Filipino spiritual healer she attended in Hamburg, the acquaintance with a Vienna-based esoteric circle espousing ideas centring on the ‘White Brotherhood’<sup>77</sup> or the teachings of the German Christian occultist Eberhard Kohler (Geertz 1994: 300). The latter, Maria E. maintains, indeed anticipated the essential message of Ōkawa whom she sees in Kohler’s doctrinal succession. Ōkawa brings to fruition a cosmic truth fed into a comprehensive and coherent system of thought, which, for her, is of absolutely compelling nature, leaving behind no shred of doubt. Ultimately, Maria E. refers to her strong emotional bond with Ōkawa, saying: ‘To me he is clearly what he says [...], I am worried about him perhaps like a mother is about her child, that in the end he may collapse under this great burden, because he has just so few people helping him’.<sup>78</sup>

Ursula F. is a shiatsu and energetic practitioner who joined KnK in April 2010. Born and raised in Vienna, she stems from a Catholic environment but has been largely indifferent towards the Christian faith. Only later, starting in her mid-20s, burgeoning interest in things spiritual made her delve into Buddhism, Daoism and various esoteric traditions with a particular focus on kabbalah and Christian mysticism. Ursula F. was introduced to KnK through Hiroyuki I. during *Esoterik Tage 2009* where she maintained her own booth. Especially attracted by the group’s webpage and KnK anime, she quickly found herself actively involved in a number of joint activities including a trip to Japan. For her, ‘Happy Science truly

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77 The ‘Great White Brotherhood of Ascended Masters’ is a popular esoteric narrative, originating in theosophical beliefs and describing a circle of advanced spiritual beings—including a number of major religious personalities—who protect primordial spiritual wisdom and pull the strings of the course of the world whilst beaconing humankind to spiritual salvation.

78 ‘Ich mache mir Sorgen um ihn so wie eine Mutter für ein Kind vielleicht Sorgen macht [*sic*], dass er also nicht am Ende zusammenbricht an dieser großen Last [*sic*], weil er einfach so wenig Helfer hat.’

reaches the innermost core of a human being [...]’<sup>79</sup> bestowing elevated consciousness. She admits initial problems with KnK’s cult of personality and ‘image worship’ centred on Ōkawa, having her follow her heart whilst detaching her mind. She explicitly marginalises the role of El Cantare, rather stressing the significance of the foundational doctrine of the ‘fourfold path’ and its experiential impact on the practitioner, which she deems of supreme importance. Ursula F. sees herself more in the role of a sympathiser than being a very active member.

Similarly, Barbara F. (b. 1959), an employee in an organic supermarket who joined the group in early 2011, calls herself a ‘member staying at some distance’ (‘Mitglied mit Abstand’). Coming from a Lutheran background, early on she took a negative stance towards religion and its institutionalised form in particular, having her become an atheist. Starting in her late 20s, she rediscovered a basic curiosity for religion turning her attention to Buddhism. Reading the ‘inspiring’ works of the prolific ‘New Thought’<sup>80</sup> writer Joseph Murphy (1898–1981) had her regain faith and triggered extensive interest for esoteric literature in general, a considerable number of which is of a Buddhist undertone. After stumbling over an announcement in *Bewusst Sein*, Barbara F. was introduced to KnK when attending a lecture on self-healing held by Ursula F. and Megumi I. at the *shibu* in Zentagasse. Against all initial scepticism, she decided, for the first time, to join a religious movement owing to her being mesmerised by Ōkawa’s writings. For Barbara F., it is the emphasis on self-cultivation and the view that a single person is capable of forging his or her own destiny, overcoming distress and attaining to spiritual and physical health, that makes KnK distinct. The doctrine, she argues, is conclusive and the given relevance to the subject of reincarnation is particularly attractive. However, the overtly syncretistic tenor of KnK, recent admonitions of Ōkawa reminding her of the Christian concept of purgatory, and, most notably, the promotion of proselytising makes her feel uneasy and, accordingly, estranged her from the movement. The latter point of critique, in fact, is unanimously shared by the non-Japanese clientele of the Austrian group.<sup>81</sup>

A second generation Jehovah’s Witness and Wolverhampton-native, Mark (b. 1962) suffered under his pious upbringing. When he came of age

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79 ‘Happy Science erreicht wirklich den innersten Lebenskern von einem Menschen für mich.’

80 Emerging in the United States in the early 19th century, contemporary ‘New Thought’ is a ‘mind-cure movement’, which draws on a variety of teachings, mainly rooted in a holistic worldview centred on a pantheistic divinity. Humans are thought to be able to positively impact their own reality by virtue of spiritual sublimation.

81 See pp. 56-7.

he renounced his affiliation and delved into various spiritual teachings, practising yoga and becoming an active member of Eckankar<sup>82</sup> for five years in his early 20s, a time which has been most formative for his personal religious development. He moved to Austria in 1995, starting to work in his trained profession as a butcher and resuming his quest for meaning. In November 2009, he was introduced to KnK when talking to Hiroyuki I. and Megumi I. at *Esoterik Tage 2009*. Reading several issues of the group’s monthly magazine, he resolved to find out more about the self-proclaimed reborn Buddha, that is Ōkawa, and, eventually, joined the group in February 2011. Initial doubts were completely removed after reading a copy of *My Lover, Cross the Valley of Tears* (Okawa 2008), a fervid text extolling Ōkawa’s salvific meaning. Mark mentions that, in fact, it is the universal salvational message taught by a *living* deity, which makes KnK unique. However, whilst he considers the doctrinal system utterly persuasive, and akin to the teachings of Eckankar, he is not entirely content with KnK’s recent political engagement. In line with the vast majority of other members, Mark favours meditation practice over other group-related activities.

Interestingly, none of the interviewees, albeit being more devoted to the movement than any other non-Japanese followers, does arrange his or her daily religious routine (if there is one at all) based solely on specifications set by KnK. Rather, one ‘integrates’ various external elements regarding theory (readings, participation in trainings and lectures, etc.) and practice (prayers, meditation techniques, healing methods such as *reiki*, etc.). Actually, one may well assert that, on the contrary, in most if not all cases, offers provided by and experiences made through KnK are instead incorporated into an existing constantly changing spiritual/ritual *modus vivendi*. This accentuates one aspect in particular that could be extended to the entire non-Japanese ‘membership’ of the Vienna-based group; those resorting to KnK<sup>83</sup> are deeply ingrained in an ideological setting shaped by esoteric beliefs, embracing the movement as a transitional and/or partial supplier of beneficial means for the pursuit of spiritual self-cultivation. It is this *laissez-faire* member commitment, which, eventually, accounts for the

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82 Eckankar, occasionally styled ‘The Religion of Light and Sound,’ is a new religious movement founded in the United States in 1965. Its soteriological vision embraces the idea of spiritual purification which leads to spiritual freedom, wisdom and benevolence. Ultimately, the practitioner shall become a ‘Co-Worker with God’, fully realising His light and sound.

83 The four samples discussed in this chapter also confirm a general tendency in terms of gender composition and religious socialisation of KnK adherents, that is, a preponderance of middle-aged women originally entrenched in a Christian milieu.

lack of and strenuous opposition to proselytising by the non-Japanese ‘neophytes’.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

This study deals with the history of a newcomer in the religious landscape of Austria and its little more than two decades of development relevant so far. Since it is an imported religion which has its origin in the innovative religious climate of modern Japan, the ‘pre’-history of the movement was also of particular interest. One remarkable trait of this study is the fact that the history of Austrian KnK already began in 1989. Since its parent organisation came into existence just three years earlier, this date is a clear sign of highly professional self-representation on various levels which resulted in a remarkable spread even beyond Japan at this early date. Both early members were Japanese and, interestingly, belonging to another Japanese new religious movement before joining KnK. It is evident that a great variety of different offers on an ‘open market’ is part of their socialisation within a diversified religious scenery, including a large number of ‘new religious developments’—a general cultural and social framework much different from the situation in Austria.

The fact that both early members were Japanese is a kind of continuing factor in the further history and another important result of this study: As far as can be seen, KnK is a ‘religious supplier’, which is mainly relevant for ethnic Japanese and, evidently, only of limited appeal for non-Japanese, viz. Europeans. Although there have been non-Japanese interested in the movement in the course of its short history, the potential to establish a substantial non-Japanese membership structure seems not to be given. Yet, this would be an essential precondition for major acceptance and wider perception.

This obvious problem may be explained by referring to another important outcome of this study: As was shown in the detailed description of the history and formation of KnK many features of its teachings should be—from a religio-historical point of view—connected with the so-called New Age-movement which grew substantially since the middle of the last century, mainly in the United States, and spread all over the world. It has built a globally available religious culture with comparable patterns of thought and similar language—nowadays commonly referred to as ‘esotericism’—with various points of connection across cultural boundaries. As it is the case with KnK, the non-Japanese ‘members’ who have been interviewed in the course of this study were indeed cruising within this



specific ‘esoteric’ scenery before getting in contact with KnK. Interestingly, their focus was not on the search for a ‘Buddhist’ group and they were not participating in any Buddhist denomination with its different representations in Austria before joining KnK, but they came across their new ‘spiritual abode’ owing to particular ‘esoteric’ interests. In this respect KnK is able to connect at various points with a specific layer of modern spirituality-culture as it is relevant in Austria as well.<sup>84</sup> The fact, however, that most non-Japanese do not stay for longer or seem to drift to other ‘offers’ on the ‘esoteric market’ is an indicator of a general problem the movement has to face. One explanation may be the ‘fluidity’ (Lüddeckens and Walthert 2010) of religious affiliation as it is an eminent factor in today’s religious landscape. Another possible explanation is the great gap between Japanese and European religious culture on various levels. The highly organised and strictly hierarchical organisation of KnK with a ‘reincarnated spiritual entity’ as a ‘president’ who gives authoritative insight into the only truth of the ‘spirit world’ seems far off the commonly marked highways of ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ as present in Austria. This is also true for the core-teachings of KnK on the essence and function of Ōkawa Ryūhō not only as the messenger but as the actual and definitive representation and the reincarnation of the ultimate truth of the spirit-world, respectively, with various predecessors in an imagined pre-history of mankind and a crucial salvific function. Any attempts to push non-Japanese members to conduct active proselytising to build up the ‘utopia’ as imagined by the movement were rejected so far and recently even caused major conflicts within the group. This attitude does not seem to fit into the religious climate of contemporary Austria and the particular socio-religious layer the movement connects with. Although KnK reacted with the tendency to de-emphasise these aspects and to introduce these teachings cautiously, it is nonetheless the core of its doctrine and the ultimate legitimisation of its organisational structure.

It should be added that the difficulties KnK has to face in Austria are probably not limited to this country alone. As far as the sketchy experience of research done so far in countries like Germany, the United States or Canada allows us to state, we can say that KnK’s structure of membership

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<sup>84</sup> This result is also closely connected with the difficult question of how to classify KnK: Although there is a strong tendency to connect with the Buddhist tradition and to present itself as a modern version of Buddhism it is more than evident that the history of its foundation and important features of its doctrine are to be interpreted as an outflow of the above mentioned globally available ‘esoteric’ or New Age-culture with specific adaptations into the socio-cultural context of Japan. The short history of its adaptation in Austria is another proof of this assertion.

in these countries is similar to the one described here for Austria: A small Japanese core with a constantly floating membership of non-Japanese. The future will show whether the movement is able to cope with this crucial topic regarding its further development.

## Appendix



Picture 1: Core members of Austrian KnK with European branch leader Igata Takashi in the middle, Jakschgasse in 2000



Picture 2: Members of Austrian KnK at *Idea no kai* in Amsterdam in 1992.



Picture 3: Outer view of Austrian *shibu* in Zentagasse 40-42



Picture 4: Prayer room (*reihashitsu*) of Austrian *shibu* with *gohonzon* in the centre



Picture 5: Recent photograph of Ōkawa Ryūhō

**Glossary**

Albena Simeonova	Албена Симеонова
Asahara Shōkō	麻原彰晃
Hiroyuki I.	宏幸
Ichikawa Kazuhiro	市川和博
Ichikura Yōichi	一倉洋一
Igata Takashi	井形卓
Kazuko K.	和子
Lǎozǐ	老子
Masahiro K.	昌裕
Megumi I.	めぐみ
Midori S.	緑
Nakagawa Tadayoshi	中川忠義
Nakagawa Takashi	中川隆
Nanako P.	七子
Nichiren	日蓮
Nikkō	日興
Nishiyama Shigeru	西山茂
Ōkawa Kyōko	大川きょう子
Ōkawa Ryūhō	大川隆法
Shimazono Susumu	島菌進
Sonoko S.	園子
Takahashi Shinji	高橋信次
Takayoshi Takagi	高木孝義
Taniguchi Masaharu	谷口雅春
Uchimura Yasunari	内村泰也
Yashima Yoshirō	八島義郎
Yoshikawa Saburō	善川三朗
Yukari K.	ゆかり
Yūko M.	結子
Ai	愛
Akita	秋田
Akita Shinkōkan	秋田信仰館
Ano yo	あの世
Ataeru ai	与える愛
Biggu ban	ビッグバン
Budda saitan	仏陀再誕
Buppō shinri	仏法真理
Bussetsu shōshin hōgo	仏説 正心法語

Chi	知
Chiku	地区
Chikuchō	地区長
Chō-kodaishi	超古代史
Chōfu	調布
Chūkyū seminā	中級セミナー
Dendō	伝道
Dokkyō University	獨協大学
Eien no hō	永遠の法
Eikyū tsuihō	永久追放
Eru Kantāre	エル・カンターレ
Eru Kantāre e no michi	エル・カンターレへの道
Eru Kantāre no rekishikan	エル・カンターレの歴史観
Eru Kantāre no sekaikan	エル・カンターレの世界観
Eru Kantāre sengen	エル・カンターレ宣言
Furaidē /Kōdansha jiken	フライデー/講談社事件
Gekkanshi	月刊誌
Genze riyaku	現世利益
Gohonzon	御本尊
Hakai	破壊
Hansei	反省
Hatten	発展
Hito o aishi, hito o ikashi, hito o yuruse	人を愛し、人を生かし、人を許せ
Hō	法
Honbu	本部
Hō-shirīzu	法シリーズ
Idea no kai	アイデアの会
Ihan	違反
Ishiki	意識
Issatsu no mondaishū	一冊の問題集
Iyashi	癒し
Jidōshoki	自動書記
Jinsei no kyōkun	人生の教訓
Jōdo-shū	浄土宗
Jōkyū seminā	上級セミナー
Jomei	除名
Kagoshima	鹿児島
Kamakura	鎌倉
Karuto	カルト
Kawashima	川島
Kenkyūin	研究員

Kigansai	祈願祭
Kiganmon	祈願文
Kōfuku	幸福
Kōfuku jitsugentō	幸福実現党
Kōfuku no genri	幸福の原理
Kōfuku no Kagaku	幸福の科学
Kōfuku no kagaku shuppan	幸福の科学出版
Kojiki	古事記
Kokusai kyokuchō	国際局長
Kokusai senryaku	国際戦略
Kono yo	この世
Kurashiki	倉敷
Kurashiki Sakuyō Daigaku	くらしき作陽大学
Kyōmon	経文
Kyoten	拠点
Kyotenchō	拠点長
Meisō	瞑想
Mie	三重
Miraikan	未来館
Mirakuru keikaku	ミラクル計画
Mondaiten	問題点
Monjukan	文殊館
Musashino Ongaku Daigaku	武蔵野音楽大学
Naruto	鳴門
Nihon shoki	日本書紀
Nyūkaishiken	入会試験
Nyūkaiban: shōshin hōgo	入会版・正心法語
Ōgon no hō	黄金の法
Oinori	お祈り
Okayama	岡山
Ōmoto	大本
Ōmu Shinrikyō	オウム真理教
Ōsutoria nihonjinkai	オーストリア日本人会
Reigen	霊言
Reihaishitsu	礼拝室
Reikai	霊界
Reiki	レイキ/霊気
Saitama	埼玉
Sakuyō Ongaku Daigaku	作陽音楽大学
Sangiin	参議院
Sapporo	札幌



Seichō no Ie	生長の家
Seichō no Ie no Ōkami	生長の家の大神
Seichi shikoku shōshinkan	聖地・四国正心館
Seikō	成功
Seiseikōrinkai	誠成公倫会
Seishin sekai	精神世界
Sekai shūkyō	世界宗教
Sekai shūkyō e no hishō	世界宗教への飛翔
Sensei	先生
Shibu	支部
Shibuchō	支部長
Shibushōja	支部精舎
Shikaku seminā	資格セミナー
Shikoku	四国
Shinbunmei	新文明
Shinbunmei o hiraku shaka no eichi	新文明を開く釈迦の英知
Shinjidai	新時代
Shinjidai o terasu shaka no keiji	新時代を照らす釈迦の啓示
Shinri	神理
Shinri no kotoba: shōshin hōgo	真理の言葉: 正心法語
Shinsekai o shimesu shaka no kōmyō	新世界を示す釈迦の光明
Shin-shinshūkyō	新新宗教
Shinshūkyō	新宗教
Shintō	神道
Shokyū seminā	初級セミナー
Shōja	精舎
Shōshinkan	正心館
Shu e no inori	主への祈り
Shugo shidōrei e no inori	守護・指導霊への祈り
Shukke	出家
Sōka	草加
Sōka Gakkai	創価学会
Sōmushō	総務省
Sōsai sensei	総裁先生
Shūgiin	衆議院
Shūkyō būmu	宗教ブーム
Taikendan	体験談
Taiyō no hō	太陽の法
Tamashii o kōjō saseru tame ni	魂を向上させるために
Tamashii shugyō no ba	魂修行の場
Tochigi	栃木

Tōhō Gakuen Daigaku	桐朋学園大学
Tōitsu Kyōkai	統一教會
Tōkyō	東京
Tsu	津
Ubau ai	奪う愛
Utsunomiya	宇都宮
Wīn no kaze	ウィーンの風
Yashima	矢島
Yonshōdō	四正道
Yōroppa shibu	ヨーロッパ支部
Yōroppa shibuchō	ヨーロッパ支部長
Yoshikawa Saburō kinendō	善川三朗記念堂
Yūtopia	ユートピア
Zaike shibuchō	在家支部長
Zenkoku buppō shinrigaku kentei shaken	全国仏法真理検定試験

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