

Lukas Pokorny and Franz Winter (eds.), *Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements*. 2018. Leiden, Boston: Brill. 620 pages. ISBN 978-90-04-36205-5.

This monumental anthology, which endeavors to provide a systematic and comprehensive picture of East Asian New Religious Movements, is undoubtedly an important and laudable enterprise. It aims to bring together thorough and competent scholarly work on a relatively novel slice of religious studies dealing with certain religious phenomena that are not only greatly debated, but are also in a constant flux. The authors and editors of the book are well aware of the complexity of the problems faced when attempting to grasp and describe fairly recent socio-historical processes that influenced the emergence and also the sudden disappearance of a plenitude of new religious movements (NRMs). These movements are habitually presented by the literature dealing with religious trends as either outsiders—“cults” or “sects”—as opposed to “traditional” or “established” religions, or as constituting an entirely new phase in the history of religious ideas that radically broke away from the past.¹ The editors of the current volume, Lukas Pokorny and Franz Winter, hold a saliently different view, which they express clearly in their “Introductory Remarks”: “Religions have always been in motion. In addition to the transformations within existing religions, the emergence of new movements is a constant factor in history ... NRMs are indeed born and bred in a specific religious milieu, and, more often than not, brought forth by and may manoeuvre within a single ‘parent tradition’” (pp. 6–7).

As the handbook deals with East Asian NRMs, naturally it is necessary to define what geopolitical entity is understood by the term “East Asia” throughout the volume. After considering several viable options utilized in diverse fields of scholarly inquiry, the editors remark that “specifically within Religious Studies ... East Asia is held tantamount to the Chinese cultural sphere, the ‘Sinic zone’” (p. 5). It is further explained that the area attains its cohesiveness from a common discursive tradition, “the shared vocabulary as well as the ideological and material heritage of the ‘Three Teachings’” (p. 5). The outcome of the age old interplay of the Three Teachings—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism—is portrayed by the authors as having produced an established worldview that provides discursive patterns and familiar moral views to the peoples living within the Sinic zone. This view is not universally accepted, as the editors are ready to admit, and there could be arguments against it, insist-

1 See for instance Matthews (2004: 4–11); Dorman (2012: 3–4); Cowan and Bromley (2015: 1–5); Lewis and Petersen (2005: 3–10); Horii (2018: 5).

ing that, for example, Mongolia, which is not, strictly speaking, within the Sinic zone, should belong in the category of East Asia, whereas Vietnam should not. The editors explain that there are certain religious commonalities in East Asia that have evolved due to common roots found particularly in certain Confucian ideals, and that these common features to this day mutually influence not only Buddhist and Daoist East Asian religions, but East Asian Christianity as well. As a result, the modern-day countries that are included in the East Asian sphere in this volume are Japan, North and South Korea, China, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

As for the other key term that is present in the title, namely, “new religious movements,” the editors’ stance is clear-cut and deliberate. “Designating religions as NRMS or ‘new religions’ is a convention, which came into use due to the lack of a more suitable terminology with respect to recently emerged religious communities” (p. 6). However, adding “movement” to the designation “allows embracing the dynamic character of new religious developments” (pp. 7–8). Therefore, it seems to be a better choice of wording than either “new religions” (*shinshūkyō*) or “new religious organizations.” Concerning the time frame, “new” signifies the developments that have been taking place roughly from the early nineteenth century until the present.

The volume is divided into four main parts, each detailing Japanese, Korean, Chinese and Vietnamese new religious movements respectively, exploring altogether twenty-five significant and influential religious groups. The first part, which deals with Japan, is the longest, comprising twelve chapters, while the second part on Korea contains eight, the third part on Chinese NRMS seven, and the Vietnamese part three. The editors explain that a pertinent factor in choosing among the groups was the “general unavailability of relevant expertise ... [which] holds especially true for more recent new religious developments in Vietnam and mainland China, a situation that is to some degree a repercussion of the harsh religio-political climate in which NRMS operate, hampering scholarly explorations in the field” (p. 3). Nevertheless, the selection of NRMS presents a broad enough picture of the religious landscape of present-day East Asia. Moreover, since all main parts are introduced by a general overview regarding the specific terminology, statistics, and periodization of each geopolitical area, the reader is provided with sufficient background knowledge in order to be well prepared to delve into the in-depth accounts of the particular case studies.

The first section addresses Japanese New Religious Movements from the late Tokugawa period (early nineteenth century) to the most recent developments in the Japanese religious scene. Following Franz Winter’s detailed Introduction (Chapter 2), which elucidates the development and the main terminology of

Japanese NRMs and offers a good general bibliography on the topic, Chapter 3 by Barbara Ambros and Timothy Smith discusses Tenrikyō. The development of Tenrikyō, a movement that currently has followers on four continents, is presented in its historical formations and reformations, from the times when it clashed with authorities to the era when it was accepted by the fascist state as it propagated State Shintō ideals, down to the postwar period when it renewed itself once again and began coping with gender issues. In Chapter 4, Nancy K. Stalker focuses on Ōmoto, another Shintō-based NRM, the spiritual leader of which has always been a female descendant of the founder, Deguchi Nao. The gender angle is also prominent in this chapter, highlighting the inverted and, at the same time, subversive gender characteristics that Deguchi Nao and Deguchi Onisaburō brought into the movement. Stalker also points to the important role that Ōmoto played both as a parent of a lineage of Shintō-based NRMs, and as a model for “charismatic entrepreneurship” (p. 53).

Monika Schimpf in Chapter 5 ushers the reader into the realm of self-cultivation and healing by introducing the movement of Perfect Liberty Kyōdan. The author lists various existing characterizations of the movement, describing it as an “old new religion” (*kyū shinshūkyō*), a “self-cultivation morality type” religion (*shūyō dōtokugata*) that belongs to the “philosophy of the mind” (*kokoro no tetsugaku*) tradition, and as a “leader-centered” group (*shidōsha shūchūgata*) that is “spiritual faculties based” (*reinō kyōdan*) (p. 69). Chapter 6, by Birgit Staemmler, describes Seichō no Ie, pointing to its shifting positions before, during, and after World War II (in which it turned from a conservative-nationalist organization into an internationally minded movement that cares about global environmental issues), its original connection to Ōmoto, and its mixture of Buddhist, Confucian, and Christian elements.

Chapter 7, by Anne Mette Fisker-Nielsen, presents one of the most well-known Japanese NRMs, Sōka Gakkai, a Nichiren Buddhist lay organization that is one of the most successful Japanese Buddhist groups both on home ground and overseas, claiming over 12 million adherents. The author draws attention to the development of the movement by juxtaposing its initial failures (it was forced to disband in 1943 by the government) to its later remarkable achievements in terms of engagement and activities related to socio-political and cultural issues, along with practical philosophy advocating human rights and human dignity. Chapter 8 by Hideaki Matsuoka introduces Sekai Kyūseikyō, an NRM whose doctrinal pillars, according to the author, are “belief in the existence of the spirit world, ancestor commemoration, putting significance on beauty, distrust of medicine, and promotion of organic agriculture” (p. 128). The chapter’s approach is essentially biographical, as it turns to the “highly subjective” (p. 129) self-published accounts by the group. The author attempts

to understand the characteristics of the movement through an analysis of its founder Okada Mokichi's life, perceived as a life of a charismatic leader.

Moving on to Chapter 9 by Victoria Rose Montrose, the reader can become acquainted with Shinnyoen, which is a relatively small group, yet has organized several high-profile events domestically as well as internationally. The author stresses the significance of Shinnyoen's efforts in creating interfaith dialogue on an international level, but also remarks that the scholarship is sparse and chiefly based on internal publications, therefore further independent research is desirable. In Chapter 10, Ugo Dessì takes us to the world of Risshō Kōseikai, one of the largest lay Buddhist movements in present-day Japan, with an estimated 3 million members. The author carefully pays heed to the distinctive features of the movement, which avoided sliding into the ultranationalism exhibited by similar groups of the era. The following chapter by Gregory Wilkinson explains how the Mahikari movement has deviated from its "grandparent" organization, Ōmoto, and has focused its practice on the purification ritual of "true light" (*mahikari*). Referring to their common Buddhist and Shintō elements, Wilkinson observes that Mahikari's teachings are fundamentally analogous with the tenets of most other Japanese NRMS, and centers his presentation on the ritual aspects of the movement (channeling, spirit possession, exorcism).

In Chapter 12, Erica Baffelli addresses the case of Aum Shinrikyō, whose members were responsible for orchestrating the lethal Tokyo subway sarin gas attack in 1995 that left thirteen people dead and thousands injured. As is well known, this event did severe damage to the status of NRMS—along with the reputation of religious studies *per se*—in the eyes of the Japanese public. Baffelli concentrates on the figure of the founder, Asahara Shōkō, and on the aftermath of the incident, including an up-to-date account of Aum's two successor organizations: Aleph and Hikari no Wa. Finally, in Chapter 13, as a conclusion to the main part on Japanese NRMS, Franz Winter turns to another divisive group: Kōfuku no Kagaku. This NRM has been often branded as a "controversial cult" by both Japanese and international media outlets, but the author claims that the group makes an interesting topic of research because it seems to hand-pick "various successful techniques of previous Japanese new religious movements" (p. 211), and also because it has been relentlessly attempting to enter the political arena.

The second major part of the book deals with Korean New Religious Movements. The Introduction (Chapter 14) written by Lukas Pokorny is followed by Paul L. Beirne and Carl F. Young's account in Chapter 15 of Tonghak or "Eastern Learning"—later renamed Ch'ondogyo, the "Religion of the Heavenly Way"—which was "an attempt to create a new religion based on native Korean and

East Asian traditions that revered Heaven" (p. 255). Chapter 16 by John Jorgensen elucidates the NRM Taejonggyo, or "Teaching of the God-Man," founded on Buddhist, Confucian and Christian religious tenets. Chapter 17 by Bongkil Chung proceeds to consider the case of Wŏnbulgyo, "Circle Buddhism" or "Wŏn Buddhism," which merges Confucian and Daoist doctrines into its Mahāyāna Buddhist world view, and aspires to help followers attain enlightenment in this life. Chapter 18 by Lukas Pokorny reviews the "Unification Movement" (UM), which, owing to its energetic proselytizing activities in the West and its controversial reputation as a notorious cult was, according to the author, "the most widely researched East Asian new religious movement throughout the 1970s and 1980s" (p. 322). Chapter 19 by Hui-yeon Kim discusses how Yŏuido Sunbogŭm Kyohoe, currently the largest Pentecostal church in the world, has adjusted its teachings to needs and specificities of South Korean society. Chapter 20 by John Jorgensen looks at the history and development of Taesunjillihoe, or the "Association of the Truth of the Grand Tour," a nationalist and ethnocentric soteriological NRM that is listed presently as South Korea's sixth largest religion. Finally, as the end piece in the Korean section, in Chapter 21 Donald L. Baker investigates Dahn World, a Daoist group—in fact, the largest in South Korea—that focuses on specific breathing and physical exercises that aim to enhance the "quality of one's *ki*" (p. 389).

The third part of the book concentrates on Chinese NRMs, and is given an Introduction by Edward A. Irons in Chapter 22. Chapter 23 by Philip Clart deals with Yīguàn Dào, "Consistent Way" or "Persistent Way," a folk religious movement that preaches about salvation; it is banned currently in the People's Republic of China, yet thrives in Taiwan. Chapter 24 by Yu-Shuang Yao surveys Fójìào Cǐjì Gōngdé Huì or the "Buddhist Compassion Relief Merit Society," "a distinctively Taiwanese movement" (p. 452) whose aims are to prevent suffering. In Chapter 25, Marcus Günzel takes into consideration the "Buddha's Light Mountain" movement or Fóguāngshān, one of the largest Buddhist organizations in Taiwan, which attempts to harmonize the different schools of Chinese Buddhism. Esther-Maria Guggenmos in Chapter 26 inspects Fǎgǔshān or "Dharma Drum Mountain" whose founder, Shengyan, aimed to interpret Chinese Buddhism in a pragmatic manner in relation to daily life and promoted "spiritual environmentalism" (p. 485), meditation and name recitation. Chapter 27 by Emily Dunn offers an account of a Chinese Protestant Christian NRM by the name of Quǎnnéngshén Jiàohuì or "Church of Almighty God" (also known as "Dōngfāng Shǎndiàn" or "Eastern Lightning"), a movement that, according to the author, "has endured more than twenty-five years in a hostile political and religious environment, and now claims to have several hundred thousand churches and millions of devotees in China" (p. 504). Finally,

in Chapter 28 Benjamin Penny tackles the case of Fǎlún Gōng or Fǎlún Dàfǎ (“Dharma Wheel Practice”), a group that advocates *qigong* exercises and meditation, and which has become world famous owing to the widely publicized and vehemently debated controversy surrounding its open confrontation with the Chinese government that has been going on for several decades.

Finally, the fourth, comparatively brief part of the book turns to Vietnamese NRMs. After Sergei Blagov’s Introduction (Chapter 29), the next chapter puts forward the case of Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ or the “Great Way of the Third Period of Universal Salvation,” a monotheistic religion that advocates non-violence and vegetarianism, and that “was able to play a crucial role in Indochina as a social protagonist and an important mediator in the process of decolonisation” (p. 565) The last chapter (30) of the volume, written by Pascal Bourdeaux, describes the religious phenomenon of Phật Giáo Hoa Hảo or “Hoa Hảo Buddhism,” a peasant movement that emphasizes its inherent connection with the rural, farming lifestyle and claims to have approximately two million followers in Vietnam today.

In the final analysis, the *Handbook of East Asian Religious Movements* is an excellently written, meticulously annotated, and elegantly presented collection of fine essays, which, in itself, is an outstanding scholarly achievement; not to mention the fact that a work of this magnitude has been long-awaited in the circles of East Asian religious studies. Before this handbook, *Establishing the Revolutionary: An Introduction to New Religions in Japan* (edited by Birgit Staemmler and Ulrich M. Dehn) had been perhaps the only textbook that focused on Japanese NRMs for a wider audience and it might still be read in conjunction and in comparison with this handbook. Indeed, several groups discussed here (except Tenrikyō and Perfect Liberty Kyōdan) are described in detail in *Establishing the Revolutionary* too, albeit by mostly different authors, and hence sometimes divergent perspectives. A comparison between, for example, the chapters on Sōka Gakkai in these two books, may serve as an interesting set up for a class on the scholarly study of contemporary religion in general. Furthermore, the inclusion of the lesser-known Korean, Chinese and Vietnamese NRMs offers a rare opportunity to put them side by side and compare them with their more familiar Japanese counterparts, and hence it facilitates gaining new and valuable insights. Both undergraduate and graduate students of Japanese religions can turn to this volume with confidence and curiosity, for they will certainly gain a better understanding of the ins and outs of the contemporary religious panorama of Japan and East Asia.

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