

Hierarchy and Identity: On a Japanese New Religion's Strategy of Maintaining Japaneseness in Brazil

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As a seminarista, what would have taken forever to learn in everyday life was easily mastered in a short time.

— An ex-seminarista

Introduction

“*Saude!*” (Bottoms up!) Paulo and I toasted and quaffed our beer. We were in a bar near Messianity headquarters in São Paulo: How many times had we gone out to bars up to the end of my stay there? We went out frequently together and talked about many things; religion, politics, music, languages, girls, and other topics. When I met Paulo for the first time in March 1991, he was an 18-year-old *seminarista*, a student of the theology of Messianity.¹ Many of the families of seminaristas are of the upper middle class or higher, and his family is no exception.

In the 1890s, several Japanese Buddhist schools started propagation in Hawaii where many Japanese had immigrated and already settled down. Thus over a century has passed since Japanese religion began proselytizing outside Japan. Among the new religions, Tenri kyo sent missionaries to Taiwan and Korea by at least the beginning of the twentieth century, and several groups have followed. Omoto was the one most eagerly propagated inside and outside Japan, claiming *Bankyō dōkon*, all religions have the same root. In his book on Japanese religions outside Japan, Inoue categorized the foreign proselytization policy of Japanese religions into two types: (1) “business trip abroad type” and (2) “multinational type”.² The principal target of proselytization of the “business trip abroad type” is ethnic Japanese. Consequently, religion which adopts this type of policy advances to the countries and areas where there have been a remarkable number of Japanese immigrants, such as Brazil and Hawaii. On the contrary, the “multinational type” seeks to propagate among not only ethnic Japanese but also non-ethnic Japanese people, and tries to propagate in countries or areas where there are few ethnic Japanese, such as European countries.

Most Japanese religions, both traditional and new, started their propagation abroad by adopting the “business trip abroad type” policy, meaning the principal target of international proselytization was Japanese-born or ethnic Japanese. Today, however, there are many religions which are of a “multinational type” propagating abroad, focusing on conversion of the general public in countries around the world.³ It is significant that in both types, the central Japanese headquarters maintain their authority. Currently, Japanese religions are propagating in Asia, Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Australia. Japanese headquarters have not encouraged branches outside Japan to establish their own identities since they may encourage the branches to seek

independence. Consequently, almost all of the branches abroad are dependent upon Japanese central authority. Although these Japanese religions have been trying to expand in foreign countries, they are attempting to maintain their identities as Japanese religions, religions that emerged and developed in Japan. This is the most significant reason for the control policy.

Sekai Kyusei kyō or The Church of World Messianity, a religion founded by Okada Mokichi (1882-1955), was introduced to Brazil in 1956. The religion has increased the number of its followers steadily and claimed that it has 300,000 followers at the end of 1999. Messianity is known for its practice of Jōrei: transmission of the light of God by holding one's hand a recipient.

Messianity has tried to achieve enculturation in a country located on the opposite side of the globe. As a result of this propagation policy, over 95 percent of its followers in Brazil is non-ethnic Japanese Brazilians. On the other hand, Messianity has also attempted to avoid extreme Brazilianization, which may change fundamental characteristics of the religion. I will try to elucidate how Messianity has kept its "Japaneseness" by focusing on the structure of its headquarters in São Paulo and on the seminarista system as an apparatus for molding elite clergy.

Religion as Contemporary Organization

Since the Meiji Restoration in 1868, numerous Japanese business conglomerates have managed companies, in diverse scales and forms, across the world. Though there is a fundamental difference between religion, which is based on divine providence, and a corporation, which is guided by economic principles, both religion and business conglomerates abroad are faced with similar difficulties. How can the organization propagate or manage with a minimum of cultural friction within a foreign culture? How can the organization maintain its identity as an organization rooted in Japan? In other words, how can the organization be true to its origins?

Religion, in general, comes into conflict with a greater variety of institutions and traditions in foreign cultures than do business conglomerates, since it is not an organization which offers job, salary, and sometimes norm of work, but an institution which provides the believers a cosmology with which they live their everyday lives, practice rituals, and die in this world. Following a religion requires commitment to its worldview, which may be alien to the sensibilities of the believer's native culture. Besides these differences, there are both conglomerates and religion in foreign cultures that share several significant difficulties, however. For example, how these organizations can reduce conflict when managing the company or propagating in a foreign culture? Another question regards their positions in foreign culture: Do they try to acculturate or try to maintain their own identities or Japaneseness?

By comparing Japanese religions and companies stationed abroad, Nakamaki proposes three categories of foreign-based Japanese religions.⁴⁾ The first category is religion whose headquarters in Japan has neither the eagerness to propagate abroad nor the policy to do so. Missionaries of this type of religion must propagate in foreign countries without suggestions and financial support from Japanese headquarters. Examples includes Shinto shrines in Hawaii such as Ise, Izumo, Konpira, and Ishizuchi. The second category is religion that tries to proselytize in foreign countries

but only adopts superficial aspects of the culture and makes every effort to maintain its own Japanese way of belief. Most schools of Japanese Buddhism and Tenri kyo are typical religions of this category. The third category is religion that tries to grasp the foreign culture positively and sometimes transforms its established rituals to fit into the religious arena of the culture. Seicho-No-Ie, PL, and Messianity are in this category. What happens in reality does not fall short of the expectation we may have: the most successful in foreign cultures is religion in the third category.

Namakaki's categorization is useful, but we need to examine Japanese new religions in Brazil in detail so that we may recognize differences between these groups more vividly. There is a significant difference between Japanese new religions before and after World War II in terms of proselytization. In earlier stage, that is up to World War II, Japanese people propagated their religions in their spare time. There are two types in this proselytization carried out in this style; (1) Japanese immigrants started propagation voluntary without any guidance and/or support by the headquarter in Japan. (2) Missionaries sent to Brazil by Japanese headquarters started propagation with high spirit. But as times went by, financial support from Japan declined and missionaries had to start working to make their livelihood. Consequently time assigned to propagation decreased sharply. Seicho-No-Ie in the 1930s is the typical case of the first type: Japanese immigrants voluntarily started propagation. The second type is Honmon Butsuryu Kō (currently Honmon Butsuryu Shū), which sent a missionary on the first Japanese ship brought Japanese immigrants in 1908. On the other hand, most propagation began after the World War II, and was guided by Japanese missionaries with ample funds sent by the headquarters in Japan. On this point, Messianity is exceptional because two young volunteers came to Brazil in 1956 without any financial support from the headquarters in Japan.

It is quite natural that if the number of the followers abroad reach a certain level, the Japanese headquarters tends to establish a department, which may be titled "Department of International Propagation," to manage foreign propagation. On the Japanese side, this procedure is necessary to maintain the identity of the religion, a religion that emerged in Japan and is deeply rooted in Japanese religiosity. This is also intended to prevent the foreign branch from taking its own line, for example, by abandoning and/or modifying the religion's proper way of faith through doctrines, rituals, and organization. These transformations in the foreign culture might cause the worst result for the Japanese headquarters, the declaration of independence by the branch abroad. As for the missionaries, this support means that their propagation is not a tentative one and they can expect more financial support from Japan.

I will focus on the Japanese new religions in Brazil. Japanese new religions are Japanese religions that have emerged since circa 1840.⁵⁾ While maintaining a close relationship with their Japanese headquarters, they have achieved remarkable success in propagation in Brazil. Nakamaki suggests that the following five factors are reasons for the success: 1) Adoption of the Portuguese language; 2) Training of non-ethnic Japanese Brazilian clergy; 3) Adoption of the Brazilian way of life and thinking; 4) Support from Japanese headquarters; and 5) Respect of the relationship between Brazilians and Japanese and/or Japanese culture.⁶⁾ We can determine whether the first four factors can be found in each Japanese new religion in Brazil. Nakamaki argues

that PL shows the first three factors.⁷⁾ I have pointed out that Messianity shows the first four factors and I think Seicho-No-Ie also displays first four factors.⁸⁾

For this paper, the second and third factors are significant, as they are indispensable for wider acceptance of the religion in Brazilian society. These two factors, however, may cause too much Brazilianization. Thus, nourishment of non-ethnic Japanese Brazilian clergy and absorption of the Brazilian way may cut both ways. It may be significantly effective in acquiring non-ethnic Japanese Brazilian followers, but it also may transform the identity of the religion.

As each Japanese manufacturer's dominant subculture has attempted to achieve its goal through a unique set of cultural equipment for organizational integration,⁹⁾ each Japanese new religion in Brazil has attempted to fulfill its own aim in the propagation. For understanding organizational aspects of Japanese new religions in Brazil, it is useful to refer to suggestive results from studies of Japanese businesses abroad. Hulbert and Brandt, who study Brazilian companies controlled by multi-national conglomerates headquartered in Japan, the United States, and Europe, reach the following conclusion: in the Brazilian offices of Japanese business conglomerates, presidents are more likely to be Japanese and control by Japanese headquarters is stricter than that of the American and European conglomerates.¹⁰⁾ Nakagawa points out that there is a high percentage of Japanese employees among Japanese companies outside Japan¹¹⁾ while Hamada suggests that Japanese multinational companies rely on Japanese employees sent abroad to manage the foreign subsidiary.¹²⁾ From these studies, I think that Japanese business conglomerates have tried to maintain the identities of their related companies abroad, by installing Japanese as executives in these companies and maintaining strict control by the headquarters in Japan. This strategy may be called a "pure Japanese policy."

Messianity among Japanese New Religions in Brazil

Has Messianity adopted a "pure Japanese policy"? It has been observed that the percentage of non-ethnic Japanese followers in Seicho-No-Ie, PL, and Messianity exceeds 90 percent. There are also many non-ethnic Japanese members of clergy in these groups. The higher the rank of clergy, however, the higher the number of ethnic Japanese, and the presidents of the Brazilian chapters of all of these three religions are of Japanese descent.¹³⁾ It may then be said that these groups have adopted a "pure Japanese policy" from this data, but major differences in the policies of these three religious organizations must also be accounted for. I will try to elucidate Messianity's policy for maintaining its identity by comparing it with these other two groups.

Seicho-No-Ie, which has propagated in Brazil since the 1930s, has many ethnic Japanese Brazilian clergy, and the president is a second-generation Japanese Brazilian. On the other hand, all successive presidents of PL have been Japanese who were sent to Brazil by the Japanese headquarters. They stay in Brazil for seven to nine years and then return to Japan. In terms of leadership, Messianity differs from both of the groups. Reverend Watanabe Tetsuo, the current president of the group, has been in Brazil for almost forty years. Since Watanabe is currently the vice-president of Messianity of Japan, he travels frequently between Japan and Brazil. Therefore, he now addresses followers only at special events such as The Festival of Heaven on

Earth, but he speaks Portuguese very well and his dynamic preaching style is popular with followers. His speeches are regularly summarized in the *Jornal Messiânico*, Messianity's monthly journal. In 1999, there were twenty five Reverends, thirteen of them Japanese who immigrated to Brazil in the 1960s.¹⁴⁾ The Japanese clergy have assimilated into Brazilian culture as they have lived there for almost forty years, although they sometimes say "I am not accustomed to *feijão* (Brazilian popular boiled bean dish)," or "I hope to send my daughter to Japan to receive a college education there."¹⁵⁾ One of them told me "we [Japanese reverends] are already half-Brazilian."

In 1967, Messianity reported that 60 to 70 percent of its 7,000 followers, and 90 percent of the *frequentador*, those who had not yet entered Messianity but visited the church, were non-ethnic Japanese Brazilians.¹⁶⁾ The percentage of ethnic Japanese among the followers of six groups of Japanese new religions in Brazil in 1967 is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Ethnic Rates among Japanese New Religions in Brazil ¹⁷⁾

Religious Group	ethnic Japanese (%)	other (%)
Omoto	50	50
Tenri-kyo	100	0
Seicho-No-Ie	99–100	0–1
Messianity	40	60
PL	80–90	10–20
Soka Gakkai	100	0

According to this research, Messianity had the highest percentage of non-ethnic Japanese among six groups. We can thus conclude that Messianity had propagated toward non-ethnic Japanese Brazilians more eagerly than other groups up to 1967, and had been successful in the project. I think that the executives of the group at that time were having ambivalent feelings towards this remarkable achievement. They were pleased to have a sense of fulfillment that they are realizing Okada's slogan "Messianity should be international," but at the same time they were afraid that Messianity would be "Brazilianized." Facing the increase of non-ethnic Japanese Brazilians followers, I believe that the leaders started considering certain procedures which might help maintain its identity. We must note that the Seminarista system, to be examined in below, is one of the main pillars for the identity maintenance project, and was started in 1971.

I return to Japanese companies. In general, when Japanese companies start business abroad they establish affiliated overseas companies as subsidiaries. Kono suggests there are three types of management in these subsidiaries.¹⁸⁾ The first type is a subsidiary whose president and managers of each department or section are all Japanese. A newly established overseas company or a company that is eager to raise productivity tends to be this type. The second type is a company whose engineering and financial departments are controlled by Japanese managers. Another feature is that the company employs many Japanese engineers and focuses strongly on engineering. The last type is a company that employs many local executives. The

president, the manager of the finance department, and staff who support these local executives are Japanese. This type is seen among companies that have a long history of business. Based on Kono's argument, it is possible that a company of the first type of management style would adopt the third type in the long run.

There has not been a Japanese new religion that resembles the third type of style in which Japanese act as consultants. But is there any possibility that there would be a group that would adopt the third management style in the future? I think yes. But at this time there are not so many non-ethnic Japanese Brazilian executives in Japanese new religions in Brazil.

The Headquarters as the Site of Power Centralization

Within Messianity's administrative structure, from Reverend (*reverendo*) at the top, through Associate Minister (*ministro adjunto*) in the middle, to Assistant Minister (*ministro assistente*) at the bottom, the clergy is hierarchically categorized. In 1999, there were twenty five Reverends; thirteen born in Japan, one ethnic Japanese Brazilian born in São Paulo, and eleven non-ethnic Japanese Brazilians. Under the leadership of reverends, 168 associate ministers and 707 assistant ministers are engaged in proselytization in seven areas across Brazil.¹⁹⁾ These seven areas are administered by area supervisors (*supervisar de área*).

Religious facilities are organized into the following categories according to the number of followers: *Igreja* (church) of more than 3,000 followers; *casa de difusão* (propagation center) of 700-3000 followers; *casa de reunião* (gathering center) of 150-700 followers; and *casa de Johrei* (house of Jōrei) of under 150 followers.²⁰⁾ At the beginning of 1999, Messianity had 40 churches. Those responsible for a church must be of the minister rank or higher.

Messianity puts significance on creativity and flexibly. In terms of language, Portuguese is the only official language of Brazil and there are no other recognized languages or dialects, except for the languages of the *índios* (aborigines). In terms of culture, however, there is rich diversity. Immigrants from several areas in the world and slaves from Africa brought their cultures to Brazil. For example, there is an obvious differences between the cultures of the southern states, such as Rio Grande do Sul, which are populated by ethnic German Brazilians, and the state of Bahia, which was a center of slave trade in the era of Portuguese control. In this diverse cultural context, the leaders of the churches have to seek appropriate avenues through which they can propagate Messianity.

The leaders of churches have to seek the best method for propagation in the cultural context of the area of which they are in charge. I will give some examples. In 1992 when I visited Salvador, the capital of Bahia state, the head of the Salvador church, who was Afro-Brazilian, proudly told me that "Bahia has its own culture," a culture which has strong African influences, specifically those of the Yoruba tribe of West Africa. Candomblé, a spiritism influenced by Yoruba traditional religion, has prevailed nationwide in Brazil, but is especially active in Bahia. Though Messianity does not officially admit to the practice of spirit possession, there are Messianity followers who seek this experience. When I was in São Paulo preparing to visit Salvador, a Messianity executive there said, "Mr. Matsuoka, you'll have an interesting experience since

Salvador is very different from here. Compared to other regions, there are more [Messianity] followers who experience spirit possession there.”

Spirit possession has been a common religious phenomenon in most of Brazil. Messianity clergy must consider how to explain the phenomenon of spirit possession to followers who claim to have experienced it. They must also prepare themselves to deal with a follower who becomes possessed in front of them and explain what occurred after he or she comes out of a trance. Though the interpretation of spirit possession is crucial to the fundamentals of Messianity doctrine because the group does not allow it, the individual clergy members must choose their own explanation for spirit possession, as there is no guideline for the treatment of this phenomenon.

Messianity churches are the focus of many cultural activities. The person in charge of the Brasilia church organized a chorus group and took care of it enthusiastically, since he thought that Messianity lacked a musical component. The chorus has become renowned among Messianity followers throughout Brazil because of its excellent performances during ceremonies and rituals. The success of the Brasilia group inspired many other churches to begin organizing chorus groups in the 1990s.

Such creativity and flexibility, however, is allowed only when it is within the basic policy determined by the leaders of the headquarters. The chiefs of the seven Brazilian area divisions and the leaders of the headquarters attend monthly conferences at which final decisions are made.²¹⁾ One of the important purposes of the conference is to maintain the conglomerate’s control of all Messianity facilities and activities, through cementing the solidarity of the leadership structure.

To better understand the reason for this focus on central control, we must understand the problems Messianity suffered in Japan. Since the foundation of the group that preceded Messianity, independent sects have split from the main religious body.²²⁾ According to Tsushima, the headquarters of Messianity in Japan did not have strong authority and control and thus it allowed the individual churches to decide their own policy.”²³⁾ Centralization of authority, termed “unification,” gradually came to be promoted after Okada’s death in 1955. This effort, however, spurred the independence of groups from Messianity, because the unification frustrated a remarkable number of clergy and followers and they rebelled against central authority.

Mechanism of Control: Architectural and Organizational Structure of the Headquarters

With Becker who argues that “core cultural values are encoded in [the] aesthetic or moral ideals of body shape,” I believe that the facilities of a religion reflect the ideology of the group.²⁴⁾ In Messianity, Guarapiranga, the religion’s principal sacred place in São Paulo state, and the headquarters in São Paulo city reflect different aspects of Messianity’s philosophy. The headquarters of Messianity is located in a quiet residential area called Vila Mariana. The center of São Paulo is Praça da Sé (Sé Park) where there is a subway station of the same name. The fifth subway station south of Praça da Sé is Ana Rosa, from where one can walk to the headquarters in seven minutes. Entering from the main gate, the eight-story administrative building is on the right, the central church on the left. In Messianity, each follower should belong to a church where s/he has registered as a follower. The central church is a special church attached to the

headquarters because it does not have its own followers though the *culto mensal* or monthly ceremony is held at the church.

Each floor of the headquarters has its own characteristics. The basement is a garage where the parked vehicles range from cargo trucks to the most expensive luxury cars for the use of high-rank clergy. On the first floor, there is an all-purpose hall with a cafeteria, where lectures or gatherings of 100 to 200 people are held and pilgrims to Guarapiranga rest. The mezzanine floor has an audio-visual section and a multi-purpose hall. Messianity's high opinion of mass media, especially in regard to its usefulness in centralizing power, is explicit in this organized and financially well-supported section. By using professional quality machinery and materials, the staff of the section produce videos, including an introduction to Messianity, documentaries of rituals, and reports on other Messianity activities such as organic agriculture and flower arrangement. Videotapes of important events are sent to churches throughout Brazil by the day after the event, so that those who cannot attend may vicariously participate in the ritual.²⁵⁾ Introductory videos depicting Guarapiranga and other places are sold to the followers. Compared to the hall on the first floor, the hall on the mezzanine floor is more formal. It is used for exhibitions of flower arrangement, pottery, and paintings. The dining room is on the second floor, where lunch for around 100 clergy members, staff, and visitors is served. Most of the rooms on the third floor are occupied by the Sangetsu school of flower arrangement, where six days a week courses at a variety of levels are offered. The editorial office of *Planeta Azul* (Blue Planet), an educational magazine for children, is in a room on the third floor. On the fourth floor, there are offices for *Kōrin* (Ring of Light), the editorial division, and the department of ancestor ritual.

Kōrin is an affiliated organization which administrates Messianity's organic agriculture operations, which is, as I have noted, one of the pillars of Messianity's faith and practice. In the early 1980s, Messianity undertook organic agriculture at its farm in Rio Claro in São Paulo state. The group now runs ten farms, five in São Paulo state, and others in Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, Salvador, and Goiás. Organic products produced in these farms, such as vegetables, fruits, and poultry, are raised without antibiotics or artificial fertilizers, and are distributed by *Kōrin* to Messianity churches.

The editing department has overseen the publication of many books, including *The Cornerstone of Heaven*, books on experience and belief, and, most recently, a book of testimonials of Guarapiranga. The department of ancestor ritual maintains a computer database of around 500,000 ancestors of 300,000 followers. On the fifth floor, there are the editorial section of *Jornal Messiânico*, the monthly journal of the group, and the financial bureau. The design office, accounting office, and administration sector are on the sixth floor. The most significant recent work by the design office is the facilities and grounds of Guarapiranga. The department of proselytization, the most important section in Messianity as it decides the policies of the group, occupies the entire seventh floor. In this department, several seminaristas work as support officers under the guidance of clergy of higher rank.

From the first to the seventh floors the interior is like that of an average office building, but the luxurious atmosphere of the eighth floor is distinct. There are two suites of rooms for the president and the vice-president, decorated in red carpet and

with thick wooden doors.

The vertical placement of these administrative and cultural sections is symbolically significant as it reflects the this-worldly hierarchical structure of the Messianity clergy. The department of proselytization on the seventh floor controls all of the sections from the basement to the sixth floor, and the president is superior to all in power and physical position. The location of his office on the uppermost floor reminds visitors, clergy, and the president himself of his highest position in Messianity. The spirit world which Messianity preaches has a hierarchical layer structure, and the spirit elevates upwardly in this spirit world as it evolves: a spirit in a higher layer in the spirit world is more important than a spirit in a lower layer because it is closer to the transcendental being. The arrangement of the sections in the headquarters is based on this idea, as propagation is of utmost importance in Messianity.

A scholar of architecture history Norberg-Schulz writes that human beings “try to establish their own norm as they stay in a certain circumstance.”²⁶⁾ By staying and working in the building of the headquarters, the members of clergy, staff, and seminarista internalize the value system of the group.

The Vocation of the Elite Clergy: Seminaristas in Messianity

If a Brazilian is experiencing trouble, he may visit a Messianity church, whether or not he is a member, and take advantage of the opportunity to talk with a member of the clergy, who will listen and give advice and suggestions. The guidance of the clergy is easily accessible. Another method of guidance, very strict and rigorous, is found in the educational system for potential elite clergy. In many large churches, there are young followers who hope to pass the examination to become seminarista.²⁷⁾ Those accepted, receive special training at the headquarters. Upon completion of this study, they may then travel to Japan for a ten-month training program. If a seminarista has attained an appropriate level of skill in the Japanese language, the church will send him or her to a Japanese university, and support them as students for four years.

All of the Japanese new religions in Brazil have attempted to establish training programs for their Brazil-born clergy, but no other religious organization sends its trainees to Japan. In 1971, Messianity established the seminarista system to train elite clergy and accepted two seminaristas as members of the first cohort.²⁸⁾ At the time, only male applicants were considered, and only one or two candidates were chosen every few years. In the 1980s, Messianity changed the policy, and decided to accept a greater number of seminaristas annually as the number of followers increased steadily. In 1990, female followers were allowed to apply, and five were accepted to the seminarista program.

By using the fourteenth league of male seminaristas as a model, I will describe the process of becoming elite clergy that the Brazilian seminaristas go through. In 1990, around thirty five young followers started to receive training as candidates for seminarista in Messianity churches throughout Brazil. At the end of the year, they took the examination for candidacy, and twelve candidates were accepted. During two years of training at the headquarters, five seminaristas quit, leaving seven seminaristas, all of whom passed the final examination. Messianity decided to exclude a seminarista from this group from the training period in Japan, as he was engaged to be married.

Thus six seminaristas went to Japan.

In Japan, they were trained at the Japanese headquarters in Atami for six months, then sent to churches in several areas assigned to each seminarista to proselytize in Japanese language for six months. After the training program in Japan, four seminaristas returned to Brazil, while two stayed in the hopes of entering a Japanese university. One seminarist, who was allowed to take the entrance examination as he achieved an excellent score in the Japanese proficiency test, entered a national university and stayed in Japan for four years. After finishing the entire seminarista course, five seminaristas who went to Japan became members of clergy. One quit, though he has been following Messianity, and has subsequently engaged in missionary activities in Brazil and Australia.²⁹⁾ The seminarista who stayed in Brazil to get married is now a missionary in Uruguay, his native country. Young Messianity followers who hope to become elites in the clergy system must all go through this rigorous series of steps in order to achieve this position.

There is a difference between the male and female seminarista systems. Men who wish to become seminaristas must first obtain official permission. If this is received, they take up residence in a church. Their duties include shopping for necessities, chauffeuring the senior clergy, and doing office work. While performing these routine tasks, he must also minister Jorei at the church and in the homes of the followers. Through experiencing the daily life of the church, he comes to understand the activities of the clergy. This experience proves invaluable when he works as a young clergy man after finishing the seminarista course. A minister who was propagating at a gathering center related his experience of candidacy, explaining in Portuguese mixed with Japanese: "I was terribly busy and I did not have time to study doctrine. Sometimes I doubted if I was doing the right thing. But now, the experience as a candidate is really helpful in managing this gathering center."

Next I will describe the avenue to becoming a member of the Messianity elite. Paulo was the first son of an upper middle class family. As Paulo's parents became members of Messianity when he was a child, he grew up in the Messianity tradition. All members of his family are Messianity followers. Paulo was planning to be a banker when he started preparation for the entrance examination to the university, but he became disenchanted with the path of material wealth. He was accepted by a top rank Brazilian university directly from high school.³⁰⁾ When he called the representative of the church to which he belonged, the clergy asked him, "Then what you gonna do?" Paulo recalled that the representative looked him through and knew that he was at a loss whether to enter university or become a clergy man. After a period of hesitation and reflection, Paulo chose entering the clergy, as he thought it was obeying the will of God. His decision, however, made waves around him as it was unexpected. Even his devoted Messianity parents did not hide their surprise and disappointment. A week later, he finally became a candidate for seminarista after he successfully got people to understand that his determination was very firm. He began living in the church.

After a year as a candidate, Paulo passed the examination for seminarista. This exam consisted of three different components: essay; written examination; and an interview. In 1991, he moved to São Paulo with feelings of high hopes tinged with anxiety, and became a seminarista of the fourteenth league. As I analyze below,

through experience, seminaristas have to study Messianity's value system, which is different from ordinary Brazilian value system in many points.

Paulo's life changed dramatically. He lived in a crowded Messianity dormitory near the headquarters in São Paulo, a stark contrast to the solitary life in a church to which he was accustomed. Now he stayed with eleven other seminaristas in a dormitory, where two to four seminarists were allotted to one room. What was more of an adjustment was the systematic training program offered by the headquarters. Paulo was trained from Monday to Friday at the headquarters for two years, except for a six-month period when all the seminaristas stayed at different churches in São Paulo to observe the techniques of practical propagation.

A typical day of a seminarista begins at around 7 a.m.. After breakfast, they clean the building until 8 a.m., when the morning prayer begins at the chapel. After the prayer, all the seminarists head to the department of propagation on the seventh floor to greet high-rank clergy. Classes begin around 9 a.m., where they learn Japanese, doctrine, and flower arrangement. Each seminarista is also allotted a series of other tasks, which may include driving the other clergy and night duty at the headquarters. I noted that Paulo felt that to be clergy is to follow God's will. Alberto, a seminarista who is studying at a Japanese university, also had a similar experience. After he failed in the entrance examination for one of the prestigious Brazilian universities because of his poor score in mathematics, Alberto came to think that his failure was a message from God to let him know that what Alberto planned was not his destiny. In searching for the proper path, he ultimately decided to join the clergy of his faith.

"Seminarista is very different from candidate for seminarista," Paulo says. To learn Japanese, a language most of them have never studied before, is among the differences. Not a few seminaristas quit because they realized that they did not have the ability to learn the language. Japanese is necessary for Messianity elite as the ability in this language proves their authenticity. But Paulo mentions that the most important change is to see Messianity executives, whom seminaristas had little chance, if any, to see and speak with directly, almost everyday. Many of them are Japanese, and to come in direct contact with their thought and behavior is the best way to internalize the norms of the religion.

For seminaristas, going to Japan is an essential step to becoming elite clergy members. Mario, a male seminarista, was uneasy about passing the final examination, because his marks in Japanese language were not good. He said to me.

When I started learning Japanese, I was shocked. The language is so different from Portuguese. Of course *Amatsu norito and Zengen sanji* [Messianity prayers] are in Japanese, but before I learned Japanese these were kind of meaningless magic spells. Oh, you don't say this to the reverends, OK? As you know I still have difficulties in Japanese language, but I want to see how Japan is different from Brazil.

Then he remarked upon a profound reason for going to Japan.

I really hope to go to Japan, you know, and there are several reasons. Japan is the country where *meishu-sama* [the founder Okada Mokichi] was born. So, Japan is, for me, the Holy Land, and I hope to touch the core of Messianity belief. That is

the most important reason.

I now turn to the second issue in the seminarista system, gender. The purpose for establishing the position of the female seminarista in 1989 was to foster “good wives” of clergy. Not a few male clergy had been suffering from marital problems. One of the significant reasons was that they were too busy in propagation to strike a balance between home and career. Thus “good wives” who would support their husbands’ vocation were seen as a necessity. There is a clear difference in obligation between male and female seminaristas. While men receive two years of training at the headquarters, the term of training for female seminaristas is limited to one year. In that period, female seminaristas are required to learn cooking, which is not required of the men.

I believe that the original intentions behind establishing the female seminarista program have been realized successfully. Many excellent young followers applied to the first cohort of the female seminarista program, and ten were selected. As it took a long time to obtain long-term Japanese visas, the scheduled one-year training time at the headquarters was prolonged to almost two years. Two seminaristas quit for personal reasons and three were asked to remain in Brazil to carry out propagation, an activity which they all have subsequently ceased. In July 1991, five seminaristas were sent to Japan. Three of them entered Japanese national universities in 1993, and graduated in 1997. At the end of 1999, two are single and are studying at graduate schools in Brazil and Japan. Three are married to Messianity clergy. The reason why I think the original purpose has been achieved is based on the fact that beginning with the second cohort accepted in 1991, many female seminaristas have married members of clergy and only one has since entered a Japanese university.

Conclusion: Reproduction of Japanese Hierarchy

The most important aspect of the seminarista training is that which is gleaned from the experiences of living at the headquarters. Direct contact with high-rank clergy is one important aspect of this experience. Paulo told me,

The life of a seminarista is completely different from that of a candidate. Among the changes, the most significant for me was the fact that I was able to see the high-rank clergy almost every day. To learn what they were thinking and doing was an excellent opportunity.

Contact with high-rank clergy is evidently an avenue to understanding the nature of Messianity faith and how Messianity leaders are expected to behave. Seminaristas learn and internalize the value system and established norms of Messianity during the training period. Among these, the most significant issue which seminaristas internalize is the absolute hierarchical structure of the group. Prime among these is the hierarchy of status. When I began my research, I was shocked to hear the seminarist’s typical reply to Japanese high rank clergy: “*Hai, Sensei*” (Yes, sir). The difference between teacher and trainee is very explicit as “Sensei,” a Japanese term for superior person, denotes a great deal of respect. After morning prayer, seminaristas greet the high rank clergy, most of them Japanese, one by one, by bowing and saying “*Ohayo gozaimasu, Sensei*” (Good morning, sir).³¹⁾

Generally, seminaristas do not use polite words to address superior seminaristas.

However, the Japanese term *sempai* is used when speaking with young clergy who have recently graduated from being seminaristas. Paulo recalled; “[When I was a seminarista] I used the word *sempai* only for those whom I truly respected. But seminaristas generally use [this term] for whomever was in an earlier cohort.” It can thus be concluded that seminaristas internalize the hierarchical norm partially through the usage of terms of respect.

The second hierarchical order is the male and female dichotomous hierarchy, which is closely related to the importance placed on proselytization. *Kaitaku fukyō*, to propagate in an area where there are no followers at all, is the first priority in Messianity’s missionary program. This kind of missionizing is open only to men, though there have been many female seminaristas and members of clergy who wished to participate. A high rank member of the clergy told me:

[A female member of the clergy] might be raped, or even killed, because this is Brazil. There are some women who do not accept my explanation by saying ‘My life is offered to God.’ But if such an incident occurred, what would I tell her parents?”

It is very difficult for women to achieve a high rank in the clergy, as they are not permitted to carry out the most important task, *kaitaku fukyō*. In the headquarters, women are generally engaged in clerical work. The original purpose of the female seminarista system, to bring up “good wives” for the members of the clergy, has been strongly maintained.

The two different types of hierarchy described above do not differ significantly from the Japanese hierarchies in which the Japanese high-rank clergy, most of them in their fifties, were raised. What does it mean, then, when Messianity seeks to have the seminaristas internalize this kind of hierarchy? The seminaristas are the elite of Messianity. After training in Japan, they will stand foremost in proselytization if they are male, or they will support Messianity clergy if they are female. Some of them will most definitely be leading Messianity in the future.³²⁾ Therefore it is important to Messianity that seminarista are sent to Japan to experience the culture of the country from which the group emerged. Messianity in Brazil, among whose followers around 95 percent are non-ethnic Japanese, has tried to maintain its Japanese identity by reproducing a distinctly Japanese hierarchical structure among seminaristas.

Notes:

- 1) I use the Portuguese word *seminarista* throughout this article.
- 2) Inoue Nobutaka, *Umi wo watatta Nihon Shūkyō* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1985), 217.
- 3) *Ibid.*
- 4) Nakamaki Hirochika, *Shin Sekai no Nihon Shūkyō* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1986), 142-67.
- 5) There is diversity in the definition of “Japanese new religion.” See Shimazono Susumu “Shin Shūkyō no Hassei Jiki” in Inoue Nobutaka, et al, eds., *Shin Shūkyō Jiten* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1990), 6-8.
- 6) Nakamaki Hirochika, “America deno Fukyō: Brazil,” 628-629. In Inoue Nobutaka, et al, eds., *Shin Shūkyō Jiten* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1990), 626-9.
- 7) Nakamaki, same as 4, 153-161.
- 8) Matsuoka Hideaki, “Nikkei Shūkyō e no Kaisin,” *Shūkyō Kenkyū (Japanese Journal of Religious Studies)* 67

- (2), 122-144.
- 9) Hamada Tomoko, "Under the Silk Banner: The Japanese Company and Its Overseas Managers," in Takie Sugiyama Lebra, ed., *Japanese Social Organization*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press), 136.
 - 10) James M. Hubert and William K. Brandt, *Managing the Multinational Subsidiary*, (New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1980), 146-8.
 - 11) Nakagawa Takio, "Kaigai Kankei Gaisha Kanri no tameno Yobiteki Kōsatsu," *Akademia (Keiei Keizai Gakkai Hen)*, 80, 141-167.
 - 12) Hamada Tomoko, *ibid*, 160.
 - 13) In 1999, Seicho-No-Ie's top rank clergy consisted of eighteen members, among whom twelve were ethnic Japanese. In the same year, PL had seventy six clergy: twenty six Japanese, twenty three ethnic Japanese Brazilians, and twenty seven non-ethnic Japanese Brazilians.
 - 14) In 2004, there were twenty four reverends (three of them were emeritus), and eleven reverends were Japanese sent by the Japanese headquarters.
 - 15) Boiled beans (*feijão*), beef, and rice are the most typical combination in Brazilian food.
 - 16) Maeyama Takashi, "Japanese Religions in Southern Brazil: Change and Syncretism," *Latin American Studies (University of Tshkuba)* No. 6, 193.
 - 17) *ibid*.
 - 18) Kono Toyohiro, *Strategy and Structure of Japanese Enterprise*, (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1984), 165.
 - 19) In 2004, there were 201 associate ministers and 807 assistant ministers in nine areas in Brazil.
 - 20) Though the Portuguese spelling is *Johrei*, I use *Jōrei* in this article in English.
 - 21) As noted in note 18, Messianity currently divides Brazil into nine areas for proselytization.
 - 22) Some important groups are Mahikari, which was founded in 1959 by Okada Kotama, an ex-Messianity high rank clergy, Shinji Shumei Kai, established in 1970 by a charismatic female clergy member who was heading *Shumei Kyokai*. See Tsushima Michihito, "Sekai Kyusei kyo no Eikyo" [The Influence of the Church of World Messianity], in Inoue Nobutaka et al, eds., *Shin Shukyo Jiten [Dictionary of New Religion]* (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1990), 87-8.
 - 23) Tsushima, *ibid*.
 - 24) Anne Becker, "Nurturing and Negligence: Working on Other's Bodies in Fiji," in Thomas J. Csordas, ed., *Embodiment and Experience*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 100.
 - 25) The Ceremony of Heaven on Earth used to be held at the headquarters, but since the completion of Guarapiranga in 1995, the ceremony has been held there.
 - 26) Christian Norberg-Schulz, "Meaning in Architecture," in Charles Jencks and George Baird, eds., *Meaning in Architecture*, (New York: George Braziller, 1970), 220.
 - 27) In Messianity, only *Igreja*, religious facility that has more than 3,000 followers, can accept a candidate for seminarista, as Messianity leaders consider that only the chiefs of *Igreja* can educate and guide these young potential elite.
 - 28) Both of them have worked at the headquarters as core members of clergy.
 - 29) Messianity began propagation in Australia in 1998.
 - 30) In Brazil, entering a good university is not easy and it is common to study at a preparatory school after graduating high school in order to enter prestigious university.
 - 31) *Gozaimasu* is used to address one's superiors.
 - 32) Some ex-seminaristas are converted to non-missionary sections because the leaders consider them not appropriate for propagation. Seminaristas place those who are engaged in propagation on a higher plane than those who are not, because for them the missionary, especially *kaitaku fūkyo* (propagate in an area which has no followers), is their goal.