was Brazil, a choice suggested to Wada Kazuo by the vice chairman of Seicho-No-Ie. It seems that Wada calculated that the strength of Seicho-No-Ie in Brazil would help Yaohan to establish itself by providing both a source of employees and of potential customers. In the early 1970s Yaohan opened a total of four stores in Brazil, however the combination of the oil shock of 1973 and the high rate of inflation in Brazil meant that the venture ran into difficulties, and by 1980 Yaohan no longer had any stores in Brazil.

Despite this setback, Yaohan's overseas expansion continued, to Singapore in 1974, Hong Kong in 1984, and subsequently to mainland China, as well as the US and the UK. Although employees of overseas branches were not required to become members of Seicho-No-Ie, Seicho-No-Ie principles continued to be used in Yaohan training programmes, a policy which met with a range of responses from Yaohan's overseas staff. In Singapore Yaohan's approach caused controversy: Muslim employees objected to references to 'God' in Wada Katsu's lectures during the training programme, pointing out that Islam enjoins the worship of one God, Allah, and that they could not therefore recognise Mrs Wada's god. Training materials were re-written as a result, substituting the term 'the Creator' for 'God'.

In Hong Kong the picture appears more complex: May Wong (1994) suggests that the Chinese employees were receptive to the content of the training programme, partly because aspects of the teachings such as the emphasis on filial piety and gratitude to seniors resonated with their own cultural background. However, Heung Wah Wong (1999) points out that local Chinese staff were largely excluded from Seicho-No-Ie activities within the company, and argues that this exclusion from the symbolic heart of the company reflects the differential value placed on local Chinese staff who were seen as peripheral, compared to the Japanese managerial core.

Drawing on my own research, in Yaohan Plaza in the UK, similarly, participation in Seicho-No-Ie events such as meditation or prayers was confined to the Japanese staff. Seicho-No-Ie based training was offered to managerial staff, who attended courses in Hong Kong (an experience which met with a mixed response), but on the whole Seicho-No-Ie seemed to have little impact on the local staff. It was also noticeable that, at this distance from the headquarters of Yaohan and from the Wada family, even the Japanese employees of Yaohan UK showed little enthusiasm for Seicho-No-Ie activities, to the dismay of local Seicho-No-Ie groups, who had hoped that the opening of the UK store in 1993 would provide a boost to their organisation. Between the period of my fieldwork in 1995 and Yaohan's bankruptcy in 1997, Seicho-No-Ie activities within the store showed a marked decline, a situation which, according to one British manager, may have been exacerbated by the decline of the company itself. He commented: "If the company had been a success [Seicho-No-Ie] would have been an excellent vehicle to keep everybody interested and positive, and to create a strong culture which creates loyalty...I'm sure things would have been very different."

Yaohan's involvement with Seicho-No-Ie during the period of the company's growth, initially within Japan and later overseas, highlights both similarities and contrasts between NRMs and MNCs as both types of organisations seek to expand globally. It seems that both Yaohan and Seicho-No-Ie entertained hopes that they could cooperate in order to promote the Seicho-No-Ie philosophy, and in so doing to also help to create a distinctive corporate identity for Yaohan characterised by a strong work and service ethic. In addition, they hoped to make use of each other's organisational strengths: for example in Brazil, Seicho-No-Ie was envisaged as a source of both employees and customers for the new Yaohan stores, while in the UK local Seicho-No-Ie groups anticipated that Yaohan would provide a new source of members and organisational support.

## Patchy commitment, active resistance

In practice, however, these hopes were not fulfilled. Although the incorporation of Yaohan employees as Seicho-No-Ie members was accomplished relatively easily, at least on a nominal level, in Japan; in other countries the introduction of practices seen as religious into a workplace, or training environment, conceived of as secular, met with resistance, in particular where these practices were seen as in conflict with pre-existing religious affiliations, as in Singapore. Furthermore, evidence from the UK suggests that many Japanese employees may have seen their membership of Seicho-No-Ie as a purely formal obligation, imposed by the Wada family. Both Heung Wah Wong's research on Yaohan Hong Kong and mine on the UK suggest that in the overseas context membership of Seicho-No-Ie and participation in Seicho-No-Ie activities took on a symbolic value, ironically serving to differentiate Japanese and local staff, rather than furnishing a source of corporate unity.

In the light of this, it is perhaps not surprising that Seicho-No-Ie and Yaohan were also largely unsuccessful in making use of each other's organisational strengths – although individual contacts at the higher levels of the respective organisations seem to have been good, at lower levels individual commitment to Seicho-No-Ie on the part of Yaohan employees has been patchy at best, and sometimes characterised by active resistance, thus limiting the effectiveness of collaborations instituted from the top down. In the UK case, for example, Yaohan management was willing to let its premises be used for Seicho-No-Ie meetings, but Yaohan employees and their families would rarely participate in local Seicho-No-Ie group organised events. In addition the store was very inconveniently located for local Seicho-No-Ie members, so meetings at the store tended to be poorly attended.

Overall, although Seicho-No-Ie has a considerable worldwide presence, the expansion of the movement was not helped by its association with Yaohan, nor did Yaohan derive any substantial benefits in its expansion overseas from its association with Seicho-No-Ie. It is difficult to draw firm general conclusions from one rather unusual case, especially given Yaohan's eventual bankruptcy – as the manager quoted above pointed out, the story could have been very different if Yaohan had been successful. However, it does suggest that, however compelling the parallels and potential synergies between NRMs and MNCs may be, as the two types of organisation both seek to expand globally, the blurring of boundaries between them is experienced as problematic.

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**Notes:**

1 For a more detailed account see Matsunaga 2000

2 Spiritual training programmes are well documented in Japanese companies, see e.g. Rohlen 1973, 1974. However it is unusual for such programmes to be based on the teachings of an NRM.

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In the mid-1980s Hirochika Nakamaki wrote about Perfect Liberty Kyôdan (PL), a Japanese new religious movement with a strong presence in Brazil, comparing it to a multinational enterprise[1]. Nakamaki was the first to name such religions 'multinational religions'. A later article by Nakamaki on another popular Japanese NRM in Brazil, Seicho-No-Ie, employed the analogy of the epidemic to what he called endemic religion[2]. This article briefly summarises the major findings of these two important studies.

# Japanese NRMs as 'multinational enterprises' and 'epidemics'

Hirochika Nakamaki

PL's propagation in Brazil started when one of its Japanese members went to Brazil in early 1957. Subsequently, an instructor was dispatched from the headquarters in Osaka and its overseas propagation system gradually became well established. It was further intensified after Rev. Tokuchika Miki, the Second Patriarch, began to travel overseas after 1960. Rev. Tokuchika Miki, who worked hard for religious cooperation, had an audience with Pope Paul VI in the Vatican in 1973. The photograph of the meeting between the Pope and the Patriarch is displayed in all PL churches in Brazil, and has had a profound effect on avoiding friction with the Catholic Church. By the end of 1988, there was a total of 200 PL churches overseas: one in the United States, one in Canada, 172 in Brazil, nine in Argentina, five in Paraguay, 11 in Peru, and one in France. PL has developed its overseas presence in a way which is analogous to that of Japanese multinational enterprises, which spread their business, employing local people and establishing organisational hierarchies. This is because PL has been eager to proselytise among non-Japanese since the late 1960s.

Early propagation in Brazil was focused on Japanese immigrants to Brazil and their descendents, mainly located around the State of São Paulo, but the number of non-Japanese Brazilian followers has increased since the mid- 1960s. The main reasons for this were (1) emphasis on miracle-based faith by *oyasikiri* (the taking of an oath to God) and on thanks-based belief towards the bliss of God; (2) the linking of sympathetic personal counselling with religious practices in everyday life; (3) active propagation in Portuguese; and (4) the adoption of a system that placed Brazilian instructors at the front line of propagation when preaching to Brazilians. The PL Church has thus spread from São Paulo State to Rio de Janeiro, then on to Minas Gerais, and further to other main cities throughout Brazil. An instructor training school was founded in São Paulo in 1977. 80 percent of its 73 members up to the eighth cohort of graduates were non-Japanese Brazilians. The number of non-Japanese assistant instructors has also increased. PL purchased a piece of land in Arujá in the suburb of São Paulo in 1965, and constructed its South America "Holy Land" there. The outdoor altar, where the spirits of the dead are enshrined, is located at the centre, and is surrounded by the Instruction Department office, training hall, gymnasium, graveyard and Botanical Research Institute. A golf course and a recreational park were also constructed on the property. Fireworks at the Founder's Festival attracted tens of thousands of people from 1973 to 1979. Then the Festival was cancelled due to the traffic and security problems. Various international congresses and events have been held at the Holy Land.

In principle, all regular rituals and events are held only in Portuguese, differing from other Japanese NRMs with overseas branches, such as Tenrikyo and Sukyo Mahikari. However, the PL newspaper, *Jornal Perfeita Liberdade*, is published both in Portuguese and Japanese. Six works by Tokuchika Miki have already been translated and published in Portuguese. When they were translated, a mention of baseball, for example, was replaced by soccer so that local people might feel more familiar

Multi-ethnic gathering of Seicho-No-Ie in Brazil.

with the discussion. This process of indigenisation has been actively extended to ritual. Japanese sake (rice wine), kelp and dried cuttlefish which used to be offered at major ceremonies, have been replaced by wine and cakes in keeping with Brazilian culture.

Since the late 1960s, the national policy of Brazil's military regime has been rapid industrialisation. This has resulted in an increase in the migration of rural populations to urban areas and the trend towards nuclear families. People have been in search of new, more suitable lifestyles and moral codes to meet with the experience of urbanisation and the nuclearisation of the family, PL adopted measures to deal with these changes in an era of rapid social change, and thus was able to extend its influence among non-Japanese Brazilians in a short time.

## Seicho-No-Ie (House of Growth)

Overseas propagation started soon after Seicho-No-Ie was founded in Japan in 1930. It spread first to Korea, Manchuria and mainland China under Japan's colonial rule at that time, then to Hawaii, North America and Brazil, where many Japanese migrants lived. There were magazine subscribers in Brazil from 1930, but the first branch was officially established there in 1938 or 1939.

*'Ascendedor'* was published in 1965 as a monthly journal in Portuguese by the Seicho-No-Ie Young Members' Association. This journal played a major role in propagation among non-Japanese Brazilians. 50,000 copies were published in 1973, and 370,000 copies in 1980. About 500,000 copies of *'Ascendedor'* and about 120,000 copies of *'Pomba Blanca'* (White Pidgeon) have been published as of 1987 by the White Pigeons Association, a Seicho-No-Ie women's organisation. This figure, however, does not reflect the correct number of believers, because one believer could buy and distribute dozens or hundreds of booklets to non-members.

The Seicho-No-Ie Propagation Head Office in Latin America is located in São Paulo. There are about 60 disciplinary training centers and two training halls in Brazil, and branch offices in Mexico, Peru, Argentina and Colombia. As of 1980, there were a total of 792 local instructors (*chihô kôshi*) and 216 practitioners *(kômyô jissen iin)* overseas. Of these, two thirds of local instructors and 80 percent of practitioners were in Brazil. In 2006 there were 304 points of propagation outside of Japan. The major bases of evangelism overseas are distributed across the US, Canada, Brazil and Taiwan.

According to Takashi Maeyama's research[3], Seicho-No-Ie in Brazil has the following characteristics: It initially spread as a religion to heal diseases in the 1930s. The number of believers among the World War Two 'winning side' increased in the early 1950s. The number of women and young people of Japanese descent increased remarkably in 1960s. Since Portuguese-language propagation stations were established in 1966, Seicho-No-Ie has spread rapidly among non-Japanese Brazilians. A dual structure strategy was successfully implemented completely separating the Portuguese-language division and the Japanese-language division. In simple terms, Japanese descendents entered Seicho-No-Ie to become good Japanese, while Brazilians entered to become good Catholics. It was symbolic that they named their organisation 'Igreja' (church) in Portuguese in 1970. For the first time, a Brazilian member was appointed as a missionary *(dendmin)* in 1968, but he faced the obstacle of the Japanese language, which prevented him from being promoted to the level of instructor *(kmshi)*, the higher rank. Instructor-training seminars in Portuguese were finally organised from 1978, and many non-Japanese instructors were produced. However, the organisation itself is in the hands of executive members who are Brazilians of Japanese descent.

A Brazilian leader talking in a church of Perfect Liberty

The founder, Masaharu Taniguchi takes a strong position regarding the oneness of all religions *(bankyo kiitsu)*. In his book, *'Seimei-no-Jisso* (Truth of Life)' he insists that there can be only one truth even though preaching methods are different, and he proclaims the coexistence of Seicho-No-Ie with other religions. This philosophy has been applied in practice in the multicultural environment of Brazil.

Despite Japan's record in World War Two, the world's focus shifted to Japan's rapid post war economic growth, and the diligence of the Japanese people has come to be idealised in some overseas societies who are themselves experiencing economic development from a low base. The presence and popularity of Japanese NRMs in these societies can be linked to this phenomenon. The concepts of 'epidemic' Japanese religions and immunity, are useful here, where the spread of Japanese religions overseas is treated as analogous to the spread of illness (with no negative connotations intended)[4]. 'Epidemic' religions followed the tracks of Japanese immigrants, settling initially in the communities formed by the Japanese and their descendents; at this stage they may be regarded as 'endemic' religions, internal to Japanese migrant communities. Subsequently they spread among the non-Japanese host society, such as Brazil, which had no immunity to them due to the prevailing social conditions. The majority of such epidemic Japanese religions were NRMs. But that does not automatically mean that all religions become epidemic. It is necessary to examine how the philosophy and practice of Seicho-No-Ie have had a direct application to the problems of the Brazilians.

When I asked Brazilian executives of the Seicho-No-Ie Portuguese division in Rondônia what personal suffering Brazilians generally experience, they told me that top of the list is marital and parent-child problems, second is disease, followed by economic problems. Some pointed out spiritual issues as the fourth problem. As mentioned earlier, PL tries to offer solutions to these problems by face-to-face counselling between instructors and their followers. In the case of Seicho-No-Ie, the examples of ancestor-worship and the memorial service for the aborted foetus have become the most effective solutions it can offer for the daily life problems of its followers.

Regarding the common problems of divorce and abortion, which the Catholic Church deals with coldly, Seicho-No-Ie attracts favourable attention because it deals with these problems through a form of ritual, in addition to individual counselling and articles in the journal which followers subscribe to. Some leaders recommend their followers to worship ancestors to solve not only family problems, but also economic and health troubles. One woman told me that her relationship with her estranged husband improved after she began worshipping ancestors, and furthermore, she could eventually buy a house and a car as a result of this practice. Praying for the repose of both the husband and the wife's ancestors creates not only an intangible sense of security, but also requires that they respect each other, which makes their relationship improve.

## Epidemicising multinational religions

Internationalisation and urbanisation in Brazil are producing a middle class, and mass society is emerging as a result. Since the 1990s, globalisation has added momentum to this trend. The roles that Japan's new religious movements performed in the process of the formation of mass society have had an epidemic impact on Latin America where immunity to foreign religions is weak. Japanese popular new religious movements, which grew up in Japan after the War, including PL, Rissei Kouseikai, Reiyukai, Seicho-No-Ie and Sekai Kyuseikyo (Messianity), spread rapidly in Japan itself with their slogans of 'conquering disease and fighting poverty', 'equality of the sexes', 'spirit of diligence', etc. These Japanese NRMs then reached Latin America, and are now performing the same civilisational-historical role in the formation of a globally developing society.

Various other important non-Japanese religious movements have been observed in Latin America in the late 20th century, too. Liberation Theology emerged from the Catholic Church as one response to rapid social change, with its central idea to extend unconditional help to poor people in slums. On the other hand, Pentecostalism created structures of self-defence for the poor, but hardly shows interest in other aspects of social change. In contrast, Japan's NRMs are successful in gathering energy for their followers' desire for improvement in real life. This is because Japan's NRMs are accepted as ethical belief systems for self-salvation. Both Liberation Theology and Pentecostalism have a significant meaning in mass society where the gap in the social hierarchy is wide. On the other hand, Japan's epidemic NRMs may possibly show endemic Japanese religions' hidden infectivity when mass society shifts from class society to non-class society. It is important that research on Japanese religions in Latin America be conducted with reference to this point.

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**Notes**

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