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Tenrikyō's Divine Model through the Manga *Oyasama Monogatari*

ELISABETTA PORCU

1. Introduction

THE idea of religion continuously reinventing itself has come to the fore once again during a recent symposium held at Kyushu University.¹ A clear example is Japan's modernization during the Meiji period (1868–1912), when Buddhism needed to face the challenges coming from external threats (such as those posed by Christianity as well as foreign economic and political interests) and internal struggles related to the forced separation of Buddhism and Shintō, the subsequent persecution of Buddhism, and the establishment of what was later labeled State Shintō (*kokka shintō* 国家神道). Such a reshaping is, however, not surprising considering that religion is part of a socio-economic fabric in continuous flux and, as such, always involved in processes of transformation and (re)affirmation of

authority, being linked to politics, economy, science, and culture, as well as competitions among different religious traditions.² The field of culture, in particular popular culture, can be aptly seen as an arena where religious institutions attempt to keep their bonds to society.³ Two notable expressions of such culture, manga and anime, have become distinctive aspects of Japanese culture and significant examples of what Joseph

1 4th IMAP in Japanese Humanities Symposium on Pre-Modern Japanese Culture: Religion and Imagination in Japanese Contexts, organized by the IMAP in Japanese Humanities in December 2016. This paper was written during my stay as a visiting professor at the IMAP in Japanese Humanities, Kyushu University, and I would like to thank my colleagues Cynthia J. Bogel and Ellen Van Goethem for their kind invitation. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

2 See also the recent study on the Ise shrines by Mark Teeuwen and John Breen where the idea of Ise as an immutable sacred space is clearly deconstructed. Mark Teeuwen and John Breen, *A Social History of the Ise Shrines: Divine Capital* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2017). In present-day Japan, we can consider the strategies used by religious institutions to overcome a condition where religion is not playing an influential role in public life and their attempts to experiment with new modes of temple's management and communication with members and visitors. See my paper "Pop Religion in Japan: Buddhist Temples, Icons, and Branding," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 26, no. 1 (2014): 157–72; and John K. Nelson, *Experimental Buddhism: Innovation and Activism in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013).

3 In this regard, see my paper "Pop Religion in Japan," Elisabetta Porcu and Paul Watt, eds., *Journal of Religion in Japan* 1, no. 1 (2012), special issue on "Religion and the Secular in Japan;" and Satoko Fujiwara, ed., *Journal of Religion in Japan* 5, no. 2–3 (2016), special issue on "Secularity and Post-Secularity in Japan: Japanese Scholars' Responses."

Nye has labeled “soft power.”⁴ Through popular culture things Japanese have gained global recognition,⁵ and religious groups and individual priests have often turned to popular culture to appeal to younger generations in contemporary Japan.⁶

In this brief paper, I will focus on some crucial aspects of a manga created by Tenrikyō 天理教 (a new religious movement originating in the nineteenth-century), *Oyasama monogatari* (*Gekiga Oyasama monogatari* 劇画教祖 (おやさま) 物語), in relation to the group’s doctrine as expounded in the *Tenrikyō kyōten* 天理教教典 (The Doctrine of Tenrikyō) and the *Ofudesaki* おふでさき (Tip of the Divine Writing Brush).⁷ In particular, I will draw attention to the life of the group’s foundress, Nakayama Miki 中山みき (1798–1887), otherwise known as Oyasama 教祖, as the Divine Model (*Hinagata* ひながた) to be followed, and how her figure as a divine being is represented in the manga in an attempt to create a closer connection between her and Tenrikyō’s members.

Oyasama monogatari belongs to what Yamanaka Hiroshi has termed *kyōdan manga* 教団マンガ, which are produced by religious institutions about their teachings and founders.⁸ As I highlighted elsewhere in the case of Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗, although the institutions insist to claim the “innovative” use of

manga and anime to communicate with their members, the choice of themes and the way the founders are portrayed are quite traditional and can be seen as a manga-ized replica of accounts found in the denominations’ booklets and teachings transmitted through *kawaii* (“cute”) figures. For example, the anime *Shinran sama: Negai, soshite hikari* 親鸞さま—ねがい、そしてひかり (Shinran-sama: His Wish and Light, 2008) clearly mirrors a classical/popular narrative of the Buddhist master Shinran’s (1173–1262) life and teachings. In presenting this project, the Honganji-ha branch of Shin Buddhism has used expressions such as “innovation” and “a new current of visual propagation,” which aimed at conveying Shinran’s biography “in a style never before attempted” and appropriate for the times. Despite all these claims, however, the choice of themes from Shin Buddhist teachings, as well as the way Shinran is portrayed, are quite traditional and an expression of the Honganji-ha’s official stance. These also represent the reassuring message the branch wishes to transmit to its followers through the animated, *kawaii*, and approachable figure of its founder.⁹ In terms of both content and style, not much of a “revolution” is to be seen here.

Stylistically, the majority of *kyōdan* manga are very linear and their layout lacks cinematic diversification of the frames, such as different angles and close-ups, while the traits of the characters are roughly drawn. This is particularly evident in the case of traditional Buddhist schools, but not only there. Examples include the biographies of Buddhist masters such as Dōgen (*Manga Dōgen sama monogatari* まんが道元さまものがたり, The Manga Story of Master Dōgen 2003) and Keizai (*Manga Keizai sama monogatari* まんが瑩山さまものがたり, The Manga Story of Master Keizai, 2005) produced by Sōtō 曹洞 Zen; and the *Manga Hōnen Shōnin den* マンガ法然上人伝 published in 1995 by Jōdoshū 浄土宗 headquarters and translated into English in 2009 as *Just As you Are: The Manga Biography of Pure Land Master Honen Shonin*; or biographies of founders of new religious movements, such as Rishō Kōseikai’s 立正佼成会 *Manga Ichijō no hohoemi* まんが一乗のほほえみ (The Smile of the One Vehicle Teaching, 2001–03) on Niwano Nikkyō 庭野日敬 (1906–99), to name just a few.

4 See Craig Norris, “Manga, Anime and Visual Art Culture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Japanese Culture*, ed. Yoshio Sugimoto (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 236–60.

5 Cf. Koichi Iwabuchi, “Japanese Popular Culture and Postcolonial Desire for ‘Asia,’” in *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan*, eds. Matthew Allen and Rumi Sakamoto (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 15–35; and Matthew Allen and Rumi Sakamoto, “Introduction: Inside-out Japan? Popular Culture and Globalization in the Context of Japan,” in *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan*, eds. Matthew Allen and Rumi Sakamoto, 2.

6 This does not mean, however, that the efforts of both institutions and individual priests have been successful in terms of increasing membership, etc. See Porcu, “Pop Religion in Japan.”

7 Tenrikyō Kyōkai Honbu, *Tenrikyō kyōten* (Tenri: Tenrikyō Dōyūsha, 2012 [1949], hereafter: *Tenrikyō kyōten*); and Tenrikyō Church Headquarters, *The Doctrine of Tenrikyō*, tenth edition (Tenri: Tenri Jihosha, 2006, hereafter: *The Doctrine of Tenrikyō*). The *Ofudesaki* was revealed by God the Parent to Oyasama, who started to compile it in 1869. See Tenrikyō Church Headquarters, *Ofudesaki: The Tip of the Writing Brush*, English, Japanese and Romanization (Tenri: Tenri Jihosha, 2004).

8 Yamanaka Hiroshi, “Manga bunka no naka no shūkyō,” in *Shōhi sareru ‘shūkyō,’* eds. Ishii Kenji and Shimazono Susumu (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1996), 161. For a classification of religious and educational manga, see also Mark MacWilliams, “Religion and Manga,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religions*, eds. Inken Prohl and John Nelson (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 595–628.

9 Elisabetta Porcu, “Speaking through the Media: Shin Buddhism, Popular Culture and the Internet,” in *The Social Dimension of Shin Buddhism*, ed. Ugo Dessi (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 209–39.



Figure 1. Cover of Tenrikyō's 2008 manga, *Oyasama monogatari* (Gekiga *Oyasama monogatari* 劇画教祖 (おやさま) 物語).

Tenrikyō, on the other hand, in *Oyasama monogatari* has chosen to represent the life of the group's foundress through the genre known as *gekiga* 劇画. This term, meaning "drama/dramatic pictures," was used in opposition to manga 漫画 or "whimsical pictures," and used from the late 1950s by a group of manga artists, such as Tatsumi Yoshihiro, Saitō Takao, and Sanpei Shirato, who wanted to adopt "a more serious, graphic approach" targeting a more adult audience.¹⁰ *Gekiga* are characterized by realistic tones,

¹⁰ *Gekiga* fall into the general category of manga. See Frederik Schodt, *Manga! Manga!: The World of Japanese Comics* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1983), 66-7; and Kinko Ito, "Manga in Japanese History," in *Japanese Visual Culture: Exploration in the World of Manga and Anime*, ed. Mark MacWilliams (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 26-47. In the late 1960s, Tezuka Osamu also had to modify his style towards a more realistic, *gekiga*, style, after this genre gained popularity. See Susanne Phillipps, "Char-

acters, Themes, and Narrative Patterns in the Manga of Osamu Tezuka," in *Japanese Visual Culture*, ed. Mark MacWilliams, 68-9, 81-2.

different from the cute traits of *kodomomuke* 子供向け manga (for children) or *shōjo* 少女 manga ("girls' comics"), and by their political-oriented topics which made this genre popular among young workers and student activists, in particular in the 1960s.¹¹ Unlike other religious institutions that have focused on cute characters in their creation of manga and anime,¹² Tenrikyō has tried to locate its product within the frame of a more realistic genre where *kawaii* features hardly find a place. This does not mean, however, that content-wise the manga is "innovative," or has diverged from a "traditional" account of the foundress's life, as I will show below. The choice of the *gekiga* in this case, was not so much a strategic choice of the group than it was dictated by the fact that its author, Nakajō Tateo 中城健雄 (b. 1938), is a well-known *gekiga* artist and Tenrikyō follower, who in 1987 became head of the Tenrikyō Moritakabun 森高分 church in Aichi.¹³ In his recollection, to write the *gekiga* version of the foundress story was a way to combine his religious path as a religious leader with its profession as a manga artist, which he clearly saw as a sign sent by Oyasama.¹⁴

2. The Gekiga Biography of the Foundress of Tenrikyō

Tenrikyō is a new religious movement (*shin shūkyō* 新宗教),¹⁵ whose origins date back to the late Edo period. It was founded in 1838 by a farmer's wife and medium,

¹¹ See also Norris, "Manga, Anime and Visual Art Culture," 239, 242. Another example of *gekiga* within the religious manga is *Ningen kakumei* 人間革命 (The Human Revolution, 1989-2003) by Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, which features fifty-six volumes (now available as e-books) and a ten-anime DVD collection.

¹² See, for example, my analysis of the manga *Tannishō* and the anime *Shinran sama: Negai soshite hikari*, of the Honganji-ha in Porcu, "Speaking through the Media."

¹³ See also http://doyusha.jp/doyu/top/?page_id=16619 (accessed 21 December 2016).

¹⁴ See Nakajō Tateo, "Oyasama monogatari," *Shōwa shōnen 70* (2013), http://doyusha.jp/doyu/top/?page_id=16619 (accessed 27 December 2016). In this essay, he refers to his work both in terms of *gekiga* and manga.

¹⁵ For an overview of the periodization of new religious movements and questions on terminological issues, see, for example, Trevor Astley, "New Religions," in *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, eds. Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 91-114.

Nakayama Miki, in what is now Tenri, in Nara prefecture. As we will see in more detail below, a crucial aspect in Nakayama's life and the origin of the group, is that, according to Tenrikyō's teachings, she was chosen by Tenri-ō-no-mikoto 天理王命 (Lord of Heavenly Wisdom), or Oyagami 親神 (God the Parent) as he was called later, as his vessel in this world to save all human beings, who are meant to live a "joyous life" (*yōki gurashi* 陽気ぐらし) through a complete reliance on God's providence. This is closely linked to the idea that Nakayama's residence was the place where God had created humankind, and that Tenri is the location where Nakayama is still believed to live.

The manga *Oyasama monogatari* was originally issued in five volumes between April 1987 and August 1990 by the organization's publishing company, Tenrikyō Dōyūsha. In 2008 the first three volumes were made into a single, voluminous manga of almost 700 pages that focuses on the life story of its foundress. The first part, titled "Tsukihhi no yashiro 月日のやしゝ (The Shrine of Tsukihhi)," is centered on the foundation of Tenrikyō in Nara prefecture and the life of Nakayama Miki/Oyasama from her childhood until 1864. Part two, "Tasuke zutome たすけづとめ (The Salvation Service)," is related to events from 1864 to 1877, and the last part, "Tobira hiraite 扉ひらいて (The Portals Open)," covers episodes from 1877 until Nakayama Miki's death in 1886.¹⁶ The first volume was translated into English by the Translation Committee of the Tenrikyo Mission Headquarters in America and was first serialized in the North American *Tenrikyo Mission Headquarters' Newsletter* (2010–15). It was subsequently published by Tenrikyō Dōyūsha on the occasion of the 130th Anniversary of the foundress's death in January 2016, and a Kindle edition was made available in July of the same year.¹⁷ In the intention of the group, the manga version of the life of its foundress "was a long-cherished hope." The intent to publish a manga characterized by "dignified illustrations and simple yet appropriate vocabulary" to help the readers familiarize with the life of Oyasama and "feel closer to the Divine Model" is clearly stated in the preface.¹⁸ In this regard,

as I have argued elsewhere using Walter Benjamin's formulation, we might say that this manga—through the technological reproduction of Nakayama Miki's life and teachings—detaches to some extent "the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition" and that by reaching viewers in their own situation, "it actualizes that which is reproduced."¹⁹ Through the medium of manga and the creation of a more approachable image of the group's foundress, the distance between her (the religious object) and the viewers (as recipient of the religious message) is minimized and, as a consequence, this might lead to a closer connection of the members to the institution.²⁰ Moreover, building familiarity between the readers and the characters is an important aspect of manga (and anime) that makes the subject more comprehensible,²¹ and in this case might facilitate religious communication.

The life of the foundress as the Divine Model to be followed is crucial in Tenrikyō's doctrine. These lines from Chapter Five of *Tenrikyō kyōten* provide a version of Oyasama's exemplary (and divine) life in a nutshell:

Oyasama not only revealed the teachings of God the Parent by Her spoken word and by Her writing brush but demonstrated them in Her life. The life of Oyasama after She became the Shrine of God is indeed the Divine Model for all humankind to follow.

Oyasama wa, kuchi ya fude de Oyagami no oshie o toki akasareru to tomo ni, mi o motte kore o shimesareta. Kono michi sugara koso, man'nin no Hinagata de aru.

教祖は、口や筆で親神の教えを説き明かされると共に、身を以てこれを示された。この道すがらこそ、万人のひながたである。²²

According to Tenrikyō's teachings, Nakayama Miki, who was inclined to compassion and benevolence since

iii. The sentence "dignified illustrations and simple yet appropriate vocabulary" is missing in the Japanese original, where the term *roman* ロマン (novel) is used instead.

19 See Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

20 See Porcu, "Speaking through the Media."

21 See Mark MacWilliams, "Introduction," in *Japanese Visual Culture*, ed. Mark MacWilliams, 10.

22 *The Doctrine of Tenrikyō*, 35; and *Tenrikyō kyōten*, 45.

16 The texts are written by Hattori Takeshirō 服部武四郎 (b. 1925), a Tenrikyō member.

17 See also <http://www.tenrikyo.com/OurTeachingsOyasama.html> (accessed 14 December 2016).

18 Translation Committee Tenrikyo Mission Headquarters in America, *Tale of Oyasama* (Tenri: Tenrikyo Doyusha, 2016), Book One,

her childhood, received a revelation by Tenri-ō-no-mikoto to save all humankind when she was forty-one years old. This revelation occurred after a possession experience when God of Origin, God in Truth (Moto no Kami Jitsu no Kami 元の神実の神) chose Miki as his vessel. She became in this way the shrine where Tsukihi 月日 (lit. moon-sun) abides, *Tsukihi no yashiro*. The world and humankind were created by Tsukihi/Oyagami, and everything in the whole universe depends on his divine providence (*shugo* 守護), which occupies a great deal of space in the manga.²³ God the Parent was called Tsukihi since he “manifests in the heavens as the moon and the sun and sheds benevolent light all over the world.” His will is for human beings to enjoy what is called “joyous life” and rejoice “the blessings of heaven and earth without discrimination.”²⁴ In order to grant them salvation in the sacred place of origin, or *jiba* ぢば, God the Parent revealed himself through Oyasama, who is believed to remain alive forever at the *jiba* to protect humankind. In the scriptures, the unity of Tenri-ō-no-mikoto, Oyasama, and the *jiba* is highlighted and only through the acceptance of this truth can the path to salvation be accomplished.²⁵ The location of Nakayama’s residence was disclosed as the center of the universe and therefore chosen by Oyagami as the place to reveal himself. It is maybe no coincidence that it was located in Yamato province (present-day Nara prefecture), traditionally considered the origin of Japanese civilization.²⁶ Here Tenrikyō headquarters were built with the *jiba* located in the inner sanctuary of the head temple and marked by the *kanrodai* かんろだい (the stand for the heavenly dew),²⁷ an hexagonal pillar set up to prove the exact location of the origin of humankind:

There at the Jiba, I began all the human beings in this world.

The Jiba in *Nihon* is the native place of all people in the world.

As proof of My beginning of human beings, I shall put the Kanrodai into place.²⁸

23 See *Oyasama monogatari*, e.g., 162, 166, 191, and 192.

24 See *The Doctrine of Tenrikyō*, Chapter Four “Tenri-ō-no-mikoto,” 29; and *Tenrikyō kyōten*, 37. See also *Ofudesaki* X: 54 and VI: 102.

25 *Tenrikyō kyōten*, Chapter Four.

26 See Robert Kisala, “Images of God in Japanese New Religions,” *Nanzan Bulletin* 25 (2001): 22.

27 See also *Oyasama monogatari*, 493.

28 *Ofudesaki* XVII: 7-9; English translation from Tenrikyo Church Headquarters, *Ofudesaki: The Tip of the Writing Brush* (Tenri:

Moreover, the location of Tenri as the birthplace of humankind is underlined through its designation as Oyasato 親里 (residence of origin) and the words that welcome believers and visitors to Tenri city: “Yōkoso o-kaeri” ようこそおかえり (Welcome Home!).

3. The Beginning of Tenrikyō: Nakayama Miki as the Shrine of God

Nakayama Miki is depicted in the scriptures and the manga as a compassionate being since her early life. In the *Tenrikyō kyōten* she is presented as kindhearted and with a deep interest in a (non-specified) “path of faith” to the extent that she decides to dedicate her life to it. In the *gekiga*, on the contrary, following Chapter 2 of the *Kōhon Tenrikyō Oyasama den* 稿本天理教教祖伝 (The Life of Oyasama, Foundress of Tenrikyo, Manuscript Edition), some space is devoted to her initial pursuing of the Pure Land Buddhist teaching and her wish to become a nun in that tradition, which is, however, not mentioned in the *kyōten*.²⁹

A significant phase in Nakayama Miki’s earlier life, and the future of Tenrikyō, is closely knit to her moving to what would be “the Residence of Origin” (Oyasato; *moto no yashiki* 元のやしき) after her marriage into the Nakayama family. This is presented in the scriptures as a “mysterious causality” (*kushiki innen* 奇しきいんねん), as is the appearance of God the Parent “on earth through Oyasama as the Shrine.”³⁰ This idea of causality is recurrent in both the teachings and the manga and is linked at the outset of the *Tenrikyō kyōten* to the selection of Miki as the vessel of the *kami* in this world:

I am God of Origin, God in Truth. There is causality in this Residence. At this time I have descended here to save all humankind. I wish to receive Miki as the Shrine of God.

Tenri Jihosha, 2004), 460; see also *Tenrikyō kyōten*, Chapter Two.
29 See *Oyasama monogatari*, e.g., 66-70, 82-3. The *Kōhon Tenrikyō Oyasama den* was first published by the headquarters in 1956 on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the foundress’s death. Tenrikyō Kyōkai Honbu, *Kōhon Tenrikyō Oyasama den* (Tenri: Tenrikyō Dōyūsha, 2016).

30 See *Tenrikyō kyōten*, Chapter Five, Hinagata, 45; and *The Doctrine of Tenrikyō*, 35; and Chapter Three, Moto no ri (The Truth of Origin), *Tenrikyō kyōten*, 25. For an analysis of the concept of karma (*innen*) in Tenrikyō, see Robert Kisala, “Contemporary Karma: Interpretations of Karma in Tenrikyō and Risshō Kōseikai,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 21, no. 1 (1991): 73-91.

*Ware wa moto no kami jitsu no kami de aru.
Kono yashiki ni innen ari. Kono tabi, sekai ichiretsu
o tasukeru tame ni amakudatta. Miki o kami no
yashiro ni morai uketai.*

我は元の神・実の神である。この屋敷にい
んねんあり。このたび、世界一れつをたすけ
るために天降った。みきを神のやしろに貰い
受けたい。³¹

The crucial event in the founding story of Tenrikyō is Nakayama Miki's possession experience and her becoming the Shrine of Tsukihi. This experience is powerfully described in the manga³² and thus worthy of some additional space here.

Everything started when Miki's elder son, Shūji 秀司, was at one time struck by an unbearable pain in his leg. The doctor, unable to help, advised Shūji's father, Zenbei, to consult with a *shugenja* 修験者, a mountain ascetic, to pray for his son.³³ Believing that the pain was due to a curse inflicted upon Shūji by the god Isonokami (Isonokami daimyōjin 石上大明神) as he accidentally stepped on a rock where the deity was said to abide, the *shugenja* performed a ritual ceremony. Its effectiveness, however, proved useless. Various other incantations were recited at the village, and in one of these Miki replaced the shamaness who accompanied the mountain ascetic, as she would not be able to come. It was on that occasion that Miki experienced possession by God of Origin, God of Truth, who forcefully wished to receive her as the Shrine of God (*kami no yashiro* 神のやしろ).³⁴ The scene is strongly depicted in the manga: An aura of light emanates from Miki's figure while all attendees, deeply bowing down before her, are overwhelmed by the powerful words of the God flowing from the foundress's body. No other elements apart from the words of God the Parent and the figure of Miki shown from the back, engage the viewers in this scene.

Miki's family and the *shugenja* pleaded the God to choose another person and another place to reside, but the God was steadfast and warned them to accept his request for the sake of humankind or they would experience the devastation of Nakayama's house and

family.³⁵ Miki sat in *seiza* holding paper rods in both hands without eating or drinking for three days, while the negotiation of the family with the God continued. Worried about Miki's state of exhaustion, her family finally succumbed to the God's request. At this point, the health conditions of Shūji and Zenbei visibly improved and Miki awoke from her possession with no recollection of what had happened.³⁶ It was 1838, the year that marks the foundation of Tenrikyō. Miki became Oyasama and the vessel of Tsukihi as is clear from Tenrikyō's scriptures:

These thoughts of Tsukihi are spoken through
Her: the mouth is human, the mind is that of
Tsukihi. Listen! I, Tsukihi, am borrowing Her
mouth wholly, and I, Tsukihi, am lending My
mind wholly.³⁷

According to the teachings, the reluctance of Miki's family to surrender to Tsukihi's request, which would benefit humanity immensely, is explained as a sign of human self-centeredness, which led them to miss the broader picture of salvation for all. It was only by overcoming selfish thoughts and concerns that they were able to abide by the will of Tsukihi/Oyagami. In Tenrikyō's view, Oyasama is the only medium through which human beings can worship God the Parent and understand the "divine will" (*Oyagami no oboshi meshi* 祖神の思召) and the religious truth,³⁸ and Oyagami is the only true God—the others being mere "instruments" to make the "providence easier to understand."³⁹ In this regard, ten aspects of Oyagami's providence, *jūzen no shugo* 十全の守護, are listed in the scriptures and the manga. These are expressed through ten sacred names, each with a specific role in the providence plan at two levels, that of the human body (which is only lent to human beings by God the Parent) and of the world. Among them, Kunitokotachi no Mikoto is related to the eyes and fluid in the human body and water in the world; Omotari no Mikoto is the providence of warmth in the body and fire in the world; Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto are the models of man

31 *Tenrikyō kyōten*, 3; the English translation is quoted from *The Doctrine of Tenrikyō*, 3. See also *Oyasama monogatari*, 37-9.

32 *Oyasama monogatari*, 34-56.

33 *Ibid.*, 10-2.

34 *Ibid.*, 35-7.

35 *Ibid.*, 43-50.

36 *Ibid.*, 56.

37 *Ofudesaki XII*: 67-8; translation into English quoted from *The Doctrine of Tenrikyō*, Chapter One, 4.

38 *Tenrikyō kyōten*, 14.

39 *The Doctrine of Tenrikyō*, 24; and *Tenrikyō kyōten*, 30.

and woman and the seed and seed plot respectively.⁴⁰ The appearance of deities from Shintō mythology is not only due to the fact that Tenrikyō draws, among others, from Shintō and folk religions, but it seems also related to the group's attempts during the Meiji period to conform to the policy of State Shintō in order to be officially acknowledged as a religious organization.⁴¹ The manga offers a quite detailed account spread over two hundred pages of the struggles between Tenrikyō and Shintō authorities in the attempt of the group to affirm its own doctrine and the predominance of God the Parent/Tenri-ō-no-mikoto, before surrendering and signing a pledge in five articles (*Gokajō no ukesho* 五ヶ条の請書); these included a declaration that the *kami* to be revered were those of the pantheon of Shintō *kami* and that humankind (and Japan) was not created by Tenri-ō-mikoto but according to the foundation myths of the *Kojiki* 古事記 (Records of Ancient Matters, 712) and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan, 720).⁴² Such adaptations are not unusual in the history of Japanese religions, including traditional Buddhist denominations (*dentō bukkyō* 伝統仏教). There are instances where the words of founders and the teachings have been modified to fit with the demands of the times, and are used as means of supporting the imperial and nationalistic system in times of war, while later used to acknowledge war responsibilities and express pacifism.⁴³ Also, Tenrikyō, like many other religious groups, was not immune from cooperating with Japan's imperialism, and its missions expanded along with Japan's militarist efforts outside its borders. After World War

II, however, through the *Fukugen* 復元 (Restoration of Original Teaching) movement, the group altered its doctrines in an attempt to distance itself from its war/imperialistic period, which led to the revision of the *Tenrikyō Kyōten* in 1949.

4. Oyasama's Life as the Divine Model

Chapter Five of the *Tenrikyō kyōten*, titled *Hinagata* (The Divine Model), continues with the story of Oyasama after her possession experience, and important steps in her life are briefly highlighted. These are to be found in the manga in their close link to the history of Tenrikyō's growth and initial institutionalization. Everything in Oyasama's life, her religious path, and the lives of her followers is framed within the divine will of God the Parent. For example, the manga describes the difficulties faced by Oyasama's family after she gave away all of the family's possessions to the poor following Oyagami's wishes to "fall to the depths of poverty"; Oyasama's miraculous healing episodes; Tenrikyō's growth and the persecutions by the authorities, including several detentions of the foundress and her disciples; the establishment of the first *kō* 講 (associations of followers); the writing of the *Ofudesaki* and the *Mikagura uta* (Songs for the Sacred Dance) to explain Oyagami's divine plan; the systematization of the practice; the spreading of the teaching in provinces other than Nara; and lastly the foundress's passing away.

In the manga great emphasis is placed on Oyasama's central and divine image and the scenes of possession are strongly depicted, as I noted above. Her healing powers are emphasized, at first with regard to safe childbirth and then with other illnesses. This is a crucial aspect of Tenrikyō's teachings, where illness and pain are seen as a sign of God the Parent to warn individuals against going into "dangerous paths:" "Illness and pain of whatever kind do not exist. They are none other than the hastening and guidance of God."⁴⁴ To become aware of this and follow the path indicated by God the Parent will lead to the joyous life and a better world.⁴⁵ In the manga, Oyasama's healing power is also linked to conversion stories, which are a typical trait

40 See *Tenrikyō kyōten*, Chapter Four; and *Oyasama monogatari*, 374-75.

41 See also Kisala, "Images of God in Japanese New Religions," 23. Tenrikyō was recognized as one of the thirteen Shintō sects in 1908, after modifying its teachings in line with state nationalism. However, it revised its doctrines in the postwar period (1949, and further revisions were made in 1984); in 1970 it withdrew from the Association of Shinto Sects.

42 *Oyasama monogatari*, 586-87. It follows Chapter Nine of the *Kōhon Tenrikyō Oyasama den*.

43 A clear example in the field of Buddhism is provided by wartime doctrines (*senji kyōgaku* 戦時教学) in Shin Buddhism. Here, we see the modification of the scriptures in order to reinforce the institution's partnership with the imperial state, and the use of Shinran's and Rennyo's 蓮如 (1415-99) words to promote imperialism and as justification of belligerence during Japan's fifteen-year war (1931-45). See Elisabetta Porcu, "Anniversaries, Founders, Slogans and Visual Media in Shin Buddhism," *Japanese Religions* 34, no.1 (2009): 53-73; and Fukushima Kanryū and Senji Kyōgaku Kenkyūkai, eds., *Senji kyōgaku to shinshū*, 3 volumes (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1988, 1991, 1995).

44 *Ofudesaki* II: 7, translation into English quoted from Tenrikyō Church Headquarters, *Ofudesaki*, 27.

45 See *Tenrikyō kyōten*, Chapter Six.

of the communication strategies used by new religious movements, and the spreading of the teaching.⁴⁶

Stylistically, from the moment Oyasama ceases to be the human Nakayama Miki and is acting and speaking as God the Parent (which covers almost 600 pages of the volume), she is either seen from the back, or her profile is shown. Sometimes she is depicted from a frontal angle but her face is never shown to preserve her sacredness—her body being the vessel, or in Tenrikyō's terms, the Shrine of God the Parent. Along with the connection to the sacred aspect of the foundress, the shrouding of Oyasama's face in this manga may remind us of the convention in premodern Japan of concealing the emperor's face in paintings.⁴⁷ To hide the foundress's visage locates her figure in a realm that, although linked to human beings and this world, is at the same time above and detached from the viewer's domain.⁴⁸ This is in accord with the scriptures, where it is taught that although Oyasama's physical appearance was still no different from that of "ordinary people," her mind was that of God the Parent.⁴⁹

5. Conclusion

This short paper has focused on Tenrikyō's use of manga as a way to transmit Oyasama's Divine Model to its members and its attempt to facilitate religious communication through this medium. The group's engagement has resulted in a product that, according to Tenrikyō itself, is at the same time educational and adequate to depict and "dignify" Nakayama Miki's life. The story of Oyasama, her sacredness, the foundation and later developments of this new religious movement from the late Edo period to the foundress's death in 1887 are conveyed through the *gekiga* genre with its use of realistic tones rather than a manga characterized by *kawaii* traits, as in the case of other religious organiza-

tions. The Divine Model (*hinagata*) of Oyasama's life and actions is the basis of this volume and the source of its religious legitimacy. This model is presented and highlighted in the manga not only through a textual correspondence with the teachings, including direct quotations from the scriptures, and the various explanations in notes, but also visually through the choice of drawing techniques. Oyasama's face is always concealed and she is portrayed as a liminal figure, yet very present and engaging with the viewers. In this way, the audience is constantly reminded of her existence as God the Parent in this world, his vessel, and the medium between the world of humankind and the divine realm of God, from whom, according to the teachings, all derives and on whose providence everything depends.

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46 *Oyasama monogatari*, e.g., 167–68, 188, 190, 296, 362–68.

47 See, for example, Matthew P. McKelway, *Capitalscapes: Folding Screens and Political Imagination in Late Medieval Kyoto* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 150, 207.

48 This is different from the depiction of founders in other manga I analyzed, such as Hōnen, Dōgen, and Niwano, who, though highly respected, are still considered human beings, and therefore this technique is not used.

49 *Oyasama no sugata wa, yo no tsune no hitobito to kotonaru tokoro wa nai ga, sono kokoro wa, oyagami no kokoro de aru* 教祖の姿は、世の常の人々と異なるところはないが、その心は、祖神の心である。See *Tenrikyō kyōten*, 5; *The Doctrine of Tenrikyō*, 4.

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