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Review: The purpose of this work is to explore the nature of the Japanese religion known as Omoto on the basis of its international presentation via the medium of Esperanto. Omoto, meaning "Great Source", can also be written as Oomoto, and this is how it appears in Esperanto publications. The religion probably has the most substantial literature in Esperanto of any East Asian religion, a fact which has often been mentioned, but never really studied, by Japanese and western scholars alike.

The Swedish author, Leif Nordenstorm, is an expert reader of Esperanto who has taken the trouble to study the picture of Ômoto which emerges from these sources. These consist not only of long excerpts from the "sacred" works, published under titles such as *Sankta Skribo* or *La Rakontoj el la Spirita Mondo*, but also many other key titles such as "Michi no Shiori" in the journals *Oomoto* and *Oomoto Internacia*, or mission guides such as *Oomoto, La Nova Spirita Movado* or *Kio estas Oomoto?* Japanese sources are not used. After an introduction giving essential information about the religion and offering methodological considerations, chapters 2 and 3 document and discuss the relation between Omoto and Esperanto and the Omoto mission via Esperanto, in a sense providing the heart of the work. They are followed by further substantial chapters, all based on Esperanto sources, on the world-view of Omoto, the concepts of divinity, the view of man (or humanity), and the teachings on salvation and the transformation of the world. A short chapter on iconography which then follows is interesting but could have been worked out more fully.

The underlying assumption is that in view of the extent of the Esperanto sources "Omoto in Esperanto" is a subject in its own right. But does this really work? For example, it appeared necessary to provide introductory information about Omoto for the wider readership, including Omoto in Japan, so there is a question about where this information comes from and how firmly based it is. One answer might be that it corresponds to the current state of knowledge in the history of religions. In general this is true. Moreover the author has taken the trouble to visit the headquarters of Omoto in Japan. However it is a little more complicated, for there remains a question about the relation between the image of Omoto which we find in the Esperanto sources,

which are indeed Ōmoto sources, and the day-to-day realities of Omoto as a religion in Japan itself. Even though Esperanto has a high status in for Omoto believers, the latter are not normally thinking in Esperanto. Quite apart from the field-work situation, even a textual comparison with Japanese originals would have been very valuable. Certain key points could have been considered from this point of view. For example, what happens to the Japanese religious terms and concepts in Esperanto? The word *kotodama* is translated as *vortoanimismo*. The word *kami* is translated as *dio* (explained in Swedish as *gud*, i.e. god). The word *matsuri*, usually translated into English as "festival", is "translated" here into Esperanto as *akordigo* (bringing to agreement), *ekvilibriigo* (balance) *harmoniigo* (harmonisation) and *diservo* (divine worship) (p.139). Thus the Esperanto certainly gives a particular direction to the concept, while Japanese persons would simply think *matsuri* ("festival"), however this is then further explained to them. In some cases the Esperanto version of names is a little disconcerting. For example we find Onisabro Deguci, and not Onisaburo Deguchi. Do Japanese Esperantists just decide for themselves how to render their names in Esperanto? There seems to be no good reason for changing the publicly taken decision on the rendering of Japanese names, i.e. with the modified Hepburn system. But if we are led into the exploration of the world of Omoto through Esperanto, the question arises as to what happens in the thought world of an Esperantist readership. What place do the texts take up in Esperanto libraries, etc.? But this question also remains unanswered here.

One of the reasons why the Omoto case is particularly interesting is that its history coincides with most of the phases of Japan's modern history. Quite a few of the other "new religions" were founded later, after the end of the second world war. For this reason, too, some account has to be taken of Omoto within Japanese history, and in this regard other works could easily have been adduced. It seems to me that there is too much dependence on the Esperanto sources alone. One does not need to look very far. The Japanese author MURAKAMI Shigeyoshi, for example, is quoted in a little detail (p. 117) on the basis of another work by Ryūko Woirgardt on the above-mentioned Seicho no Ie, but Murakami's own work *Japanese Religion in the Modern Century* (Tokyo 1980) is not adduced. However this has been available for twenty years and sets Omoto and other religions in the general context of modern history. It could be argued that "enough" secondary literature has been adduced to locate the research in the scholarly world. Locating bibliographical resources is very time-consuming and it is not surprising that quite a few specialists end up by publishing surveys and bibliographies of the new religions of Japan, rather than studying anything in particular. At least, Leif Nordenstorm has avoided this danger.

Nevertheless some very well-known names such as Earhart, Kohler and Thomsen will be missed in the bibliography. None of these has written a specialised study on Omoto, but they certainly include Omoto in wider perspectives of various kinds. If we enlarge our view to include related religions in Japan, or ones which have emerged out of the same background or are in some ways similar, then the literature would be much greater. In particular, the question of international outreach by new Japanese religions is a rather wide one. I myself made a theoretical suggestion about it in an article about the Byakko Shinkokai (which has now been published three times). This religion does not use Esperanto, but it has a peace liturgy in which all the countries of the world are prayed for, one by one, both in Japanese and in a kind of English based on Japanese pronunciation via katakana. Now

it so happens that the founder of Byakko Shinkokai was originally a teacher in the Japanese religion known as Seicho no Ie (House of Growth), which itself was founded, as an inclusive religion, by a former member of Omoto. In other words we are talking about a very widespread religious culture here which somehow seeks to deal with questions about national and international identity. Omoto's outreach via Esperanto is part of it. If there is not so much success in terms of actually getting converts throughout the world, what then is the function of this "internationalism" for the Japanese believers? It seems to me that we find a double function of identity building in such cases: first identity with the international world but second, and equally if not more important, identity as Japanese in the international world.

Returning to the author's own intention however, it may be said that he has provided a useful and most interesting service in reporting and analysing the Omoto sources in Esperanto. Thus we have an unusual work here which has its own fascination and should be taken into account in more general accounts of Omoto and the new religions of Japan.

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