Complications in Defining the Presence of Tenrikyō in Europe While Discussing Its “Community”
When Brief Summaries of an Unbound Group Just Won’t Do

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Abstract

This paper addresses a central issue linked to research conducted on an eclectic conglomerate of people connected in various ways to the principal European site of the Japanese new religion of Tenrikyō. Although the center itself is in a Parisian suburb and the majority of its key actors are Japanese, the people connected to this center and its associated social world span beyond the Paris region and include various nationalities, countries of residence, and even religious identities. Moreover, the people connected to this center and the presence of the Tenrikyō religion in Europe are largely one and the same, but not entirely. A question commonly posed to the researcher by “outsiders” is how many Tenrikyō “members” there are in Paris, France, and/or Europe, and if they are Japanese or the nationality of the local country (French, German, etc.) The complexities of answering such questions are the focus of this discussion.

Keywords


1 Introduction

Tenrikyo Europe Center (TEC) was founded in 1970, at a time when the presence of Tenrikyō 天理教 in Europe was minimal to none, as a center from which
to both expand the presence of this Japanese new religion¹ in Europe and to serve as a gathering point for followers living on the continent. Similar to other such regional Tenrikyō centers, its main purpose is to facilitate communication and interaction between numerous lineage-based sites² within a specific geographic region, in this case that of Europe.³ Because of this, its social world and many of its “core members” span beyond the Paris region where the center is located to also include people living in various other European locations who come together primarily, though for many not exclusively, at TEC.

Additionally, the social world of TEC also encompasses a gradation between those who are not at all involved in the markedly religious aspects of Tenrikyō despite their involvement in the broader “TEC community” and those who are devout and highly dedicated followers of the faith. Despite such spatial, personal, and social diversities, they together form an interconnected social group which constitutes an unbound community involving a complex, ever-developing symphony of social flows and webs of connection. In it, there is not a marked frontier between “insiders” and “outsiders,” but rather gradations and multiple layers of who is included in this multifarious social world. It

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¹ As explained by Inoue (Recent Trends in the Study of New Religions, p. 4 et seq.), the concept of “new religions” (shinshūkyō 新宗教) first came about in Japan after the end of WWII. There are varying perspectives on the temporal demarcation associated with this category. Some position it at the beginning of the 19th century, others at the early part of the Meiji period (1868–1912), while others, less commonly, at the beginning of the 20th century or following WWII. The early part of the Meiji period is the most commonly cited definition, reflective of the great social turmoil and rapid modernization associated with this period, and connectedly, the coming about of a category called “religion” (shūkyō 宗教). As discussed by Josephson (The Invention of Religion in Japan), when American warships appeared off the coast of Japan in 1853 despite it being against Japan’s seclusion policy, they expressed their unwillingness to leave unless two letters, which included the word “religion” twice, were delivered to the emperor of Japan. Translators did not know what this word meant as there was no equivalent term in the Japanese language for a concept as broad as “religion” nor a systematic method of distinguishing between “religions” as members of a general category. Essentially, Josephson asserts, Japan got “religion” because it was imposed on them by a treaty: the Treaty of Kanagawa. See also Krämer (How “Religion” Came to Be Translated as “Shūkyō”) regarding the historical development of the category of “religion” in Japan during the latter half of the 19th century.

² In Tenrikyō, every person classified as a follower is rooted to a lineage-based site of worship as their “home site” and connected lineage. This lineage system (keitō 系統) is a “parent-child” structure of grand churches (daikyōkai 大教会), branch churches (bunkyōkai 分教会), and mission stations (fukyōsho 布教所).

³ TEC is not categorized as a lineage-based site, but as an inter-lineage “mission center” (shucchōjo 出張所), which means that although anyone is welcome to come to the center, it cannot be the “home site of worship” to anyone.
is from this perspective that the complications in defining the presence of the Tenrikyō in Paris, France, and/or Europe is discussed.

2 Methodology

This research was conducted for a doctoral dissertation in anthropology. I began my studies with a project focused on Japanese migrants living in the Paris area, where I was also academically based. To revive and improve my Japanese language skills, I studied the language at a “laïque” cultural association in central Paris connected to TEC (which I discuss later) for almost two years before shifting my focus, in a largely undefined manner, toward its present topic. I, then, conducted “focused fieldwork” on TEC and its expansive and multi-layered social world for two years between 2015 and 2017. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I was regularly present at TEC and a highly involved “member” of its social world, with some form of participatory involvement in organized events and activities at and connected to TEC most every week at least once, often more.

In addition to the multitude of formal and informal contexts I participated in at TEC, I also notably attended the “Monthly Service” ritual4 not only at TEC, but also at the home of my Japanese teacher. This is because it was he who served as my entry point to this religious world, and thus he who was positioned as my “spiritual parent” (ri no oya 理の親), with the mission station he headed in his familial home in the Paris area positioned as my “home site of worship.” This ascribed positioning occurred alongside my explanation that my involvement was motivated by an academic interest rather than a personal search for a source of spiritual faith.

Additionally included was a month and a half in Japan, primarily in the pilgrimage town of Tenri City, but also at several lineage-based sites connected to my “spiritual parent” and lineage in France. In general, during this two-year period, whenever an opportunity presented itself to participate in the eclectic world of and connected to TEC and Tenrikyō in a way I felt appropriate, I took it. Through spending time at TEC and getting to know a variety of people connected to the center in various ways, it became apparent that in focusing on TEC, not only was I looking at Tenrikyō in France, but also in Europe more broadly, despite the lack of clarity on who should and should not be counted as a “member” of this religious group and how to ascertain the overall presence of “members” in Europe.

4 I further discuss this ritual later.
3 Summary of Tenrikyō

Before going further in my exploration, I would like to first offer a grounding overview of Tenrikyō. According to Tenrikyō doctrine,5 Tenrikyō was founded in 1838 when the creator and sustainer of all things, referred to in this religious tradition as “God the Parent,”6 came to reside in the foundress of Tenrikyō: an agrarian Japanese woman having the soul of the original mother of all humans. Through her, it was conveyed that God the Parent created humans as its7 children so that we could live harmoniously and help one another as brothers and sisters. The ultimate ontological trajectory of humanity is positioned as that of the “Joyous Life” (yōki gurashi 阳気ぐらし), which is a happy, self-less state free from physical, mental, and social ills to be attained in this world rather than in an afterlife, with gratitude, working toward the well-being of others, and unity of mind positioned as central to achieving this ideal state. Because of humans’ mistaken thinking, “dusts”8 have accumulated on our hearts over many subsequent lives, diverting us from our ultimate destiny. The path of Tenrikyō, and its centrally important ritual of “the Service,”9 is largely to help clear away these “dusts,” thereby bringing about this salvific state.

The “Service” ritual can refer to a shorter version to be performed, ideally, every morning and evening, as well as on certain other occasions,10 and also to a longer and more complex version held at each Tenrikyō site on a site-specific day of each month, that is aptly called the “Monthly Service.”11 The Service, in its multiple variations, is comprised of scripted music and dance performed

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5 The information in the first two paragraphs of this subsection is included in a variety of Tenrikyō texts, including The Doctrine of Tenrikyo (Tenrikyo Church Headquarters).
6 Japanese: Oyagamisama 親神様. Oya 親 is a gender-neutral term meaning parent. Gami 神 is a phonetically altered version of the word “Kami,” which does not lend itself well to a direct translation into English, but can be approximately translated as “spirit,” “god,” or “essence.” Sama 様 is a suffix denoting a high level of honor.
7 I employ “it” to refer to this deity as a stylistic choice to convey its genderless character, as is taught in the faith and conveyed in Japanese Tenrikyō discourse.
8 The eight “dusts” (hokori ほこり) the foundress cited are: miserliness, covetousness, hatred, self-love, grudge-bearing, anger, greed, and arrogance.
9 In Japanese, “otsutome” おつとめ. Additionally, the “Monthly Service” is referred to in Japanese as “tsukinamisai 月次祭; つきなみさい.” This latter Japanese term denotes a monthly celebration, generally of a ritual nature. As put forth by Morishita (Teodori, p. 3), the original linguistic sense of the “Monthly Service,” loses some of its import in its English translation.
10 Such as a supplication prayer or to commemorate an occasion.
11 It is possible for the longer version of the Service to be performed on other occasions for a variety of reasons.
the same each time, regardless of location, per the foundress’ instructions.\textsuperscript{12} Additionally, another sacredly framed aspect of this faith is becoming a “\textit{Yōboku}”\textsuperscript{13} through the repeated attendance of the same “\textit{Besseki}”\textsuperscript{14} lecture nine times in a hall designated for this purpose located in the pilgrimage town of Tenri City (Japan), where the faith is spiritually and organizationally rooted. Attendance of these nine identical lectures is required to undergo the rite through which one acquires the status of “\textit{Yōboku},” thereby most notably equipping the person with the ability to transmit the divine “\textit{Sazuke}”\textsuperscript{15} act of faith healing.

Amidst the numerous and diverse Japanese new religions in existence, Tenrikyō is considered to be one of the largest, particularly amongst those which came about at the beginning of what is generally regarded as Japan’s era of modernization, associated with the Meiji Period (1868–1912). It is important to highlight that Tenrikyō’s early development coincides with the Meiji government’s systematic reshaping of the national ethos of Japan, which included a differentiation between formalized religions and folk belief.

In addressing the question of how many Tenrikyō adherents there are, Kato\textsuperscript{16} explains that although the number is difficult to accurately ascertain, particularly because Tenrikyō does not have a proper rite of passage (apart from attendance of the Besseki lectures), a statistical review published by the Tenrikyō organization based on reports from local churches claimed 1,216,137 adherents in and outside of Japan as of 2008. Kato notes this number to be slightly lower than in 1986, the centennial anniversary of the foundress’ passing, at which time the religion claimed 1,687,220 adherents.\textsuperscript{17} Key to Kato’s statement is the word \textit{claimed}, as the actual number is rather unclear.

4 \hspace{1cm} Tenrikyō’s Overseas Presence and the Establishment of a Center in Paris

In addition to Tenrikyō’s existence in Japan, where the vast majority of its followers are located, Tenrikyō has expanded its presence to more than thirty

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\textsuperscript{12} The “Service” ritual can also refer to a slightly different version attributed with an additional mystical quality that is performed around the sacred point of the “\textit{Jiba}” inside the Tenrikyō Main Sanctuary in Tenri City.

\textsuperscript{13} Literally: “useful timber.” (よぶつく/ようぼく).

\textsuperscript{14} Literally: “separate seat/ special seat.” (別席).

\textsuperscript{15} おさづけ.

\textsuperscript{16} Kato, \textit{Translating a ‘religion’}; Kato, \textit{Tenrikyō}.

\textsuperscript{17} Tenrikyō Omote Tōrōshitsu Chōsa Jōhōka, \textit{Dai 8 kai kyōsei chōsa hōkoku} [cited in Kato, \textit{Translating a ‘religion’}].
overseas countries and regions.\textsuperscript{18} Much of Tenrikyō’s following outside of the Japanese archipelago is located in Taiwan\textsuperscript{19} and South Korea,\textsuperscript{20} which is closely linked to their having been under Japanese rule, and in regions of the Americas that received a large influx of Japanese immigrants, namely those of the United States and Brazil.\textsuperscript{21} These regions, along with some others that have smaller Tenrikyō presences, have laterally based sites, similar in category to TEC, to facilitate communication and interaction between different lineage-based sites in their specific geographic region.\textsuperscript{22}

Following the end of WWII, Tenrikyō entered a period of intentional restoration to its original teachings, as they had been purportedly conveyed by the foundress but changed by numerous governmental mandates and restraints thereafter. It also increased its efforts to propagate the religion overseas.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{18} Kato, Translating a ‘religion’; Tenrikyō Overseas Mission Department, A Statistical Review of Tenrikyō [cited in Kato, Translating a ‘religion’].

\textsuperscript{19} As noted by Huang (Pilgrimage, Modernity, Tourism, and Nostalgia), Tenrikyō’s doctrine based on practicality of everyday life is compatible with Taiwanese popular religion.

\textsuperscript{20} A main method of advancing Japanese assimilation in Korea during Japanese rule (1910–1945) was to install a State Shintō system. Although Shintō’s impact was minimal, in parallel, various Japanese new religious movements positioned (at least at the time) as Shintō-affiliated proselytized on the Korean peninsula, with Tenrikyō being by far the most successful with tens of thousands of adherents by 1941 (Yi, Han’guk sahoe’wa, pp. 5–7 [cited in Pokorny, Korean New Religious Movements, p. 239 et seq.]).

\textsuperscript{21} It is estimated that currently there are roughly 270,000 Tenrikyō followers in South Korea (Lee, Kankoku ni okeru Nihon no shinshūkyō), 20,000 in Brazil (Yamada, Tenrikyō in Brazil), 2,000–2,500 in Hawaii (Takahashi, Imin, shūkyō, kokoku), and 2,000 on the US mainland (Kato, Nikkei Amerikajin). As noted by Kato (Translating a ‘religion’), people of Japanese origin are regarded to comprise the majority of followers in immigrant-based regions as well as elsewhere, including Europe. Non-Japanese people make up the majority, or entirety, of followers in some of the former Japanese colonies as well as several other regions, such as the Republic of the Congo (Fujii, Senyo Taiwān ni okeru Tenrikyō no tenkai; Lee, Kankoku ni okeru Nihon no shinshūkyō; Mori, Dendō shūkyō ni yoru ibunka sesshoku. [All information in this footnote taken from Kato, Translating a ‘religion’].


\textsuperscript{23} Kato, Translating a ‘religion’. 

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A notable initiative for this made by the Second Shinbashira, a titular role denoting the spiritual and organizational leader of Tenrikyō, were numerous overseas trips made between 1951 and 1966, each comprising visits to multiple countries and/or regions in North America, South America, Asia, Africa, and Europe, with seven of those trips including time in Europe. Connectedly, in 1961, the Second Shinbashira made an official statement calling for the revitalization of overseas missionary efforts, as destined by God the Parent. In 1968, plans to establish a Tenrikyō center in Paris began taking form more concretely, with two key reasons Paris was favored over other European locations: Paris was an important transit point to Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo where missionary efforts were underway, with the number of followers steadily increasing, and Paris was also recognized as an important transit hub within Europe.

5 Local and Pan-European “Core Members” of a Multilayered Social World

Now let us take a closer look at this European center located in a Parisian suburb. Within the multilayered social world of TEC, there are multiple sub-spheres and furthermore, multiple ways its expansive presence can be interpreted. One way to group these sub-spheres would be between that of people living locally in the Paris area and that of people living throughout the broader European continent. A further subgrouping of the local individuals could be between followers of the faith and people socially connected to this center, largely by means of the “cultural” and community-oriented activities that this center engages in, who are largely not (or at all) involved in the religious side of this center and the Tenrikyō religion. Yet another grouping could be that of the “core members” of the “TEC community,” both local and throughout Europe, who are closely linked with this center and the faith’s presence in Europe. The majority, but not all, of the people included in this latter category are Japanese.

24 Literally: “central pillar.” This role was set up by the foundress who first designated it to her grandson. The current Shinbashira, Zenji Nakayama, is the fourth to occupy this role. All have been direct male descendants of the foundress.
25 This period corresponds to a time when Japanese new religions embarked on overseas proselytization efforts beyond Japanese immigrant communities and countries previously under Japanese rule.
26 Morii, Tenrikyō no Kaigai Dendō, p. 522 et seq. [cited in Kato, Translating a ‘religion’].
27 Kato, Translating a ‘religion’.
people born and raised in the Tenrikyō faith in a highly immersive manner, with many of them positioned as “missionaries,” as I will expand upon.

Within the local population of such core members, it could be further divided between those who live on TEC grounds and those who do not. Those who live on TEC grounds generally include the head of TEC, his family, and a small group of young adult Japanese missionaries, of whom in my observations there were usually between five to ten in fluctuating numbers. The head of TEC is nominated and sent by Tenrikyo Church Headquarters, and the young adult missionaries are sent by the Tenrikyo Young Men’s Association and Tenrikyo Women’s Association. The young adults are sent to work as missionary Japanese teachers at the “laique” cultural center and language school in central Paris, as well as its secretary and another administrative assistant. Additionally, others also occasionally come to reside at TEC for reasons beyond this. The young adult missionaries usually stay at TEC between one and four years, whereas the head of TEC and his family typically reside at the center for longer periods, generally well over a decade. Similar to the young adult residents, the head of TEC and his family commonly return to Japan after their term of serving in their designated role.

The most prominent segment of the wider European layer of the TEC community are the families who founded and continue to operate the home-based “mission stations.” At the time of my study, there were twenty-two of these sites dispersed between nine countries. Five were in the UK (four in the London area, one in Leeds), eight in France (four in the Paris area, and one in Lyon, Strasbourg, Collonges-sous-Salève, and Bordeaux respectively), two in Spain (Madrid and La Coruña), one in Rome, one in Vienna, one in Kiev, one in the Amsterdam area, two in Germany (Cologne and Munich), and one in Switzerland (Bühler) The main purpose of these lineage-based sites is to attract new followers to the faith, which by default situates the mission station and its connected lineage as their “home site of worship” and lineage, to provide spiritual guidance to its followers, and to orchestrate both the Morning and Evening Service and the Monthly Service – with the latter being what most commonly draws participants from outside the immediate household.

Most of the people who operate these mission stations are Japanese people born and raised in the religion who were highly immersed in it during their formative years and thereafter. A variety of particular situations are included

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28 All TEC heads thus far have been male, which is in accordance with Tenrikyō leadership positions being most commonly occupied by males.


30 This site is categorized as a “branch church” rather than a “mission station,” which is similarly lineage-based but has a higher level of requirements to be designated as such.
in how the people who founded these lineage-based sites came to do so. Most either came to France initially as young adult missionary Japanese language teachers or other TEC personnel and stayed thereafter, going on to found a mission station, were sent by officials of their church lineage in Japan to found a site under their supervision, or relocated to Europe for other reasons, often professional, and then went on to found a site where they were living. The establishment, and occasionally disestablishment, of these sites has been a gradual progression approximately since the time TEC was founded in 1970. Some draw significant numbers, such as for example several dozen, while others draw only a handful of people, or less, outside their own household.

People from most of these mission station families, though not all, were present semi-regularly at TEC, such as for special events, trainings, and other gatherings that drew people from disparate European locations. Most others who came to TEC from elsewhere in Europe, also mainly for such gatherings, were linked to these mission stations and the people who hosted them, thereby further demonstrating their significance to the broader social world of TEC. A good number of the latter people viewed themselves as Tenrikyō followers, while some decidedly and openly did not, and still others fell into a grey area regarding if they should be counted as a follower of the faith or not.

6 Ritual and Non-Ritual Gatherings That Draw Together Local Members of the Broader Group

The segment of the “TEC community” comprised of local Tenrikyō followers was most prominently constructed and reconstructed via the Monthly Service ritual held at TEC each month. It was in this recurring ritual event that TEC’s categorization as a religious site was most pronounced. Generally, people who attended these ritual gatherings lived locally, with the majority but not all being self-described Tenrikyō followers. There were usually approximately thirty to forty people in attendance. About two-thirds were female. Roughly sixty percent were Japanese (or in the case of several young adults, the children of Japanese missionary parents born in Europe), and approximately ten percent were French. The remaining thirty percent or so were composed of numerous other nationalities, with it being common for people of about ten different nationalities to be in attendance.

The ritual is divided into three segments, each involving fifteen ritual actors, thereby making it possible for a multitude of people to actively take part in its performance. Despite this, it was generally the local core members of the “TEC community,” almost unanimously Japanese and most often born into and raised in the faith, who served as ritual actors. Others in attendance, many
of whom being positioned in more of the peripheral layer of the “TEC community,” watched and listened from the audience section. Even in these religiously focused scenes, there could be questions on how the classification of being a “Tenrikyō adept” should be quantified and qualified, as not everyone present would position themselves, nor would others position them, as such. Furthermore, some in attendance would be positioned in this category by others, but not necessarily themselves. While others, still, may not necessarily be positioned by some onlookers as such despite positioning themselves and being positioned in this category by some, at least those who know them well, as being such due to their habitual abstention from performing in the Service ritual at TEC despite it being possible for all adults who wished to do so and had adequately invested themselves in their understanding of the faith to be deemed qualified.31

Moreover still, while for many families who regularly attended this monthly ritual or were otherwise actively involved in the religious side of TEC, all family members were Tenrikyō followers, this was not always the case. In some families, for example, one spouse regarded Tenrikyō as their source of spiritual faith and religious tradition and was highly engaged in participation at TEC and in other Tenrikyō contexts, while the other spouse was a more occasional presence, largely to be involved in something of importance to their spouse's life. A slight variation were families in which both spouses and any children they may have regularly came to Tenrikyō events, but only one spouse considered her/himself to be a follower of the faith, often with their children exposed to the religious backgrounds of both parents while growing up.

Additionally, TEC also hosted a number of events annually that were not markedly religious in nature, but which drew together mainly local people, such as a large rummage sale for charity, a traditional mochi rice pounding event in preparation of the new year, and a cherry blossom viewing picnic to name a few. Some people in attendance were Tenrikyō followers who also came to TEC for religious activities, such as the Monthly Service, but a good number were not. The majority of the non-Tenrikyō people who came, and relatedly were connected with TEC and its social world, first attended Japanese language classes at the affiliated “laique” cultural center and language school

31 Although generally in Tenrikyō, one must have attained the status of Yōboku to serve as a ritual performer at sizable Tenrikyō sites, during my fieldwork, I saw two examples of people permitted to perform in the TEC Monthly Service after having completed the three-week religious seminar at TEC who were not Yōboku, per the head of TEC’s authorization. Regardless of this flexibility, though, one must obviously be able to perform the instrumental music or dances to serve in this role. An additional, connected, requirement is to be linked to a lineage-based site, which all such people were.
in central Paris, founded in 1971, a year after the founding of TEC, as a point of liaison to build connections between the local people and missionaries working there. Although the Tenrikyō religion is not discussed at this laïque center, invitations to non-religious events at TEC, such as those aforementioned, are often extended.

7 Thinking about How “Being Tenrikyō” Can Be Defined or Determined

Now that I have outlined the multiple intersecting sub-spheres that come together to form the broader social world of TEC, let us look at the multiple ways being a “follower” of Tenrikyō can be defined in relation to individuals, and connectedly types of situations, included in this group. This will be done in relation to thinking about who should and should not be included in this category and how Tenrikyō’s presence in Europe should be summarized. The question of if people are Tenrikyō followers and how many followers are present in a particular location was complicated not only to myself as a researcher who started as a complete outsider, but also for people born and raised in the faith. To elaborate on the complex question of how to determine if a person is an adept of Tenrikyō, I will refer to an explanation of multiple ways this question can be approached that was given by an instructor of a three-week religious training program held at TEC. This training is an important annual event that brings together followers, and often a few interested non-followers somehow connected with the faith’s presence in Europe, usually via a mission station. Generally, core members of the “TEC community” serve as instructors and support staff, while more peripheral members, newcomers, and young adult core members who have not yet taken part in this training participate as students.

The instructor, Mr. Takeshita,32 was a Japanese Tenrikyō follower in his fifties who had been living in the Paris area and a core member of the “TEC community” for approximately the past twenty years. He had initially moved to France as a young adult Japanese missionary teacher, stayed in France after his term of service, and went on to found a home-based mission station, while continuing to teach at the cultural center as a permanent employee. When the question of how it is determined who is and is not “Tenrikyō” arose in our class, Mr. Takeshita explained that this is a complicated question without a truly definitive or absolute response.

32 Pseudonym.
He then expounded on this statement first by telling us about a moment that was revelatory for him. There had been a Japanese family friend who sometimes came to the Takeshita’s mission station for Monthly Services. One day, this friend asked Mr. Takeshita how one “becomes (a member of) Tenrikyō.” Mr. Takeshita told us that he was quite surprised by his friend’s question because he had assumed that since his friend was already coming to Monthly Services, he already viewed himself as a follower of the religion. This friend, though, clearly did not. His friend’s question prompted Mr. Takeshita to think about how one does, in fact, become an adept of the religion and what renders one a follower. He told us that there isn’t really a specific process through which one becomes an adept of the faith. Some people think of becoming a Yōboku as being almost synonymous with becoming a full adult member of the religion, but in fact, becoming a Yōboku capable of transmitting the healing gift of the Sazuke is something different than becoming a follower of the path.

Mr. Takeshita then told us that this question could, in fact, hold multiple meanings. One way this question could be addressed is simply if a person views themself as a follower of the religion or not. From this viewpoint, whether or not one is a follower is based primarily on one’s own self-understanding. Another way this question could be determined is if other Tenrikyō followers view the person as a fellow follower based on their actions, such as being kind, helping others, and coming to Monthly Services (if they live somewhere this is possible, Mr. Takeshita specified.) Similarly, he added, even if a person does not say they are a Tenrikyō follower, if their actions are in line with what it is to be a Tenrikyō follower, such as coming to Monthly Services, being kind, and helping people, others are likely to refer to the person as a follower even if the person has never declared themself as such. Mr. Takeshita then went on to say that beyond the basic question of if someone is a follower of the religion in the eyes of both oneself and other Tenrikyō followers, this question in certain contexts can also refer to a more profound sense of what it is to be a Tenrikyō follower – meant to prompt reflection on both oneself and the path of Tenrikyō. The first two senses (self-perception and inclusion by others) evidently lend themselves better to an academic assessment of the religion’s presence than the latter.

Official counts of Tenrikyō followers reflect not how many people view themselves as such, but how many people are viewed as such by others. Such a count could be done numerous ways and would each produce different results, each with its own shortcomings. One way would be to count the number of people commonly present for Monthly Services at each Tenrikyō site in a specific location, such as France or more broadly, Europe, for a localized count or throughout the world for a global count. The obvious problem with such a method is that, as demonstrated through the friend of Mr. Takeshita, not
everyone who attends Monthly Services views themselves as being included in this category and conversely, for various reasons, not all Tenrikyō followers regularly attend these ritual events.

Another potential method could be to look at a count of people holding the designation of “Yōboku,” as this is a definite and registered category. As noted by Mr. Takeshita, being a “Yōboku” is not synonymous with being a Tenrikyō follower, but it can provide us with a clue as to the size of Tenrikyō’s following. According to a list of Yōboku documented to be living in Europe published by Tenrikyō Church Headquarters in 2019, there were 231 Yōboku in France and 503 Yōboku in Europe. In thinking about this count, though, it is important to bear in mind that not all followers have undergone the rites through which to become Yōboku, not all people who have undergone these rites continue to follow the Tenrikyō faith, and some people who become Yōboku never viewed Tenrikyō as the source of their religious identity or faith in the first place. Even amongst people who acquired this designation and remain actively involved in the faith and its connected social context(s) thereafter, not all would cite “Tenrikyō” as their religious identity. Thus, we can see that quantifying the number of adherents is not a neatly defined endeavor.

8 Conclusion

I would like to now return to the issue of looking for a succinct description of the multilayered social world of TEC that is linked to the inadequacy of using this center as directly reflective of Tenrikyō’s presence in Europe. The multiplicity present at this European center was a key feature of it. Although the majority of its key social actors were Japanese and the center itself was based in France, its social world was neither fully French nor fully Japanese. Instead, it belonged to a fluid inclusivity in which the differentiating frontier between what it was to be included in this “community” and what it was to be outside of it was unclear. One could simultaneously be inside and outside, depending on which layer was focused upon as this European center’s specificity was partially derived from its multiplicity.

The boundaries between the numerous channels of connection to TEC and its associated social world were not solid, but rather differentiated via perforated compartmentalizing markers through which crossovers and interconnections were common. An important factor of this center being a centralizing point

33 Tenrikyō omoetōryōshitsu: Dai hachijyū hachi kai Tenrikyō toukei nenkan Rikkyō hyaku-hachijyuni nen Reiwa gan nen.
of “community” was that there was no set criteria to be part of it. “Becoming Tenrikyō,” and becoming a fully integrated “member” of the “TEC community” were both gradual processes inculcated through direct explanation and/or instruction and also through the indirect method of exposure to norms and practices via “initiated” individuals, such as core members of the group. To a great extent, it was the existence of “core members” in multiple spheres of this community that served as an important basal linking feature into which more peripherally positioned people were then included. It was not necessary for any one individual to be involved in all spheres of this multilayered social collectivity to be a part of its larger unbound whole nor was there set criteria to determine which of these group members should and should not be counted as a “member” of the religion as for both, “membership” was non-fixed and openly defined.

Bio

Margaret Brady defended her Ph.D. thesis in Social Anthropology and Ethnography titled, “Constructing a Transnational Community via a Japanese New Religion: the Case of a Tenrikyo Center in a Parisian Suburb” at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (Paris) in 2020. Previously, she conducted anthropological research on Hmong horticultural practices in Alaska and its cultural significance. Her undergraduate training in psychology is also influential to her work. Margaret’s primary theoretical interests include transnationalism, cultural adaptation and change, migration, community, pedagogy, ways of knowing and learning, the sensory, embodiment, and spiritual practices.

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