

Defining Post-Bubble Religious Communities in Japan: The Case of Konohana Family

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Abstract – In Japanese society, some spiritual groups have received the definition of NRM and NNR by scholars, however, there are also spiritual groups that are yet to be discussed comprehensively and do not have a clear definition. This article discusses the spiritual group Konohana Family Community, which is referred to as an ecovillage, as a case study to examine how contemporary Japanese spiritual communities are categorized. Although the community shares many practices with ecovillages, some of their beliefs such as the faith in the divine's will, communication with the world of the kami, mythologies regarding the Japanese ancient ancestors and the structure of the universe and existence, together with various practices lead by a charismatic spiritual leader are in line with NRM and NNR. Accurate identification of the category Konohana Family belongs to will help to analyze other groups and communities operating in contemporary Japan, understand processes happening in these groups, and better evaluate the structure of contemporary Japanese society.

Keywords – Neo-New Religions, Japanese Religions, Konohana Family Community, Spiritual Groups, Community.

I. INTRODUCTION

Categorizing different groups in the Japanese society is not an easy task. While some groups seek to be acknowledged as a religious group, other refrain from such definition. Yet, while self-definition is one aspect, it is also important to carefully examine the beliefs and practices of the group and categorize it according to its nature based on previous knowledge. Group sorting is done to gain a better understanding about the beliefs and practices of its members and not the other way around. In the end of the day, categorizing the different groups in the society helps us understand better the wider social texture to which these groups belong to. In Konohana Family Community (KH), a spiritual self-sustained community based in Fujinomiya, Shizuoka Prefecture, there are several aspects that could be considered religious, such as believing in gods and goddesses, a leader with supernatural powers, daily rituals like praying and chanting, and a unique mythology about the origin of the Japanese people. However, the literature so far only treated KH as an ecovillage with spiritual beliefs, no reference to KH's religious aspects was done, and comparison between KH and other Japanese spiritual groups of the era is limited. The definitions given to KH so far are: an ecovillage (see Arizona, 2020; Brecher, 2013; Dregger, 2016; Togami, 2018; Veizaga & Yamaji, 2010) more specifically, a spiritual ecovillage (Liftin, 2016, p. 249), eco-community (Pickerill, 2016, p. 31), a cross-cultural intentional community (Budd, 2018), a sustainable community (Matsutani, 2014, p. 156), and 'a community focused on spirituality, sustainable agriculture, and mutual aid system (Laurea, 2020, p. 93).

This article attempts to comprehensively observe KH, thoroughly looking into the spiritual, practical, and leadership aspects of the community. Data was collected by the author while living in the community for three months. The author conducted interviews with the community leader and members, analyzed the community's materials like articles, books, diaries, and presentations, as well as newspaper and website articles written about the community by a third party. While the community is largely referred to as an ecological community, it does not see itself as such, nor as a religious organization, which poses a question of self-definition, as well as an

objective definition, as much as possible, relying on previous scholar knowledge. Despite the small scale of the community (89 members as of May 2018), it is important to investigate such groups to recognize current trends and processes that are happening in the Japanese society in the new millennium.

II. NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND NEO-NEW RELIGIONS

New interpretations of existing religions are as old as Jodo-shu in the 12th century and Nichiren in the 13th century, yet scholars identify the groups emerged at the end of the 19th century as New Religions or New Religious Movements (NRM). Such groups, including Tenrikyo and omoto-kyo, were established by charismatic leaders who introduced new interpretations to existing religions like Buddhism and Shinto. They were striving to form a new social order by encouraging followers to act for the sake of the group, perform rituals, and participate in the group's activities. In the following century, more NRM were established, among which two of the most prominent are the Church of World Messianity (Sekai Kyusei Kyo) and Mahikari, which both not only had strong charismatic leaders who could cure illness through a divine light but also strived for the restoration of the man-environmental connection, mainly through the practice of organic agriculture in the strive of establishing paradise on earth (Blacker in Clarke, 2013). Although thousands of NRM emerged in the years after WWII, those established at the end of the 1970s are said to be distinguished by their faith. They were named Neo-New religions or New-New religions (NNR) by Nishiyama Shigeru in 1979, a term that was later developed by Shimazono Susumu (in Tsukada, 2012, p. 135). These groups differ from their priors by their hybrid teachings from existing religions, as well as the concepts of 'the spiritual world', a prominent focus on this-worldly benefits, and practices of "reformation of the heart/mind" (kokoronaoshi) (Prohl, 2012, p. 247). In the NNR, the focus is on the spiritual level of the individual, which emphasizes the importance of the mental practice, as well as the physical ones.

The NNR flourished when the Japanese economy was on the rise, and although there had been comparisons between doctrines of the same group before and after the end of the bubble economy (See Tsukada, 2012, p. 149-150 for a comparison of the nationalism in Mahikari and Kofuku no Kagaku before and after the bubble economy. Interestingly, the shift in Mahikari was made from a national-focus on spiritual cultivation, kokoronaoshi, to a community and individual-focused one), no research have been made concerning NNR or similar spiritual groups founded after 1991. Whether KH could be called an NNR or not requires close examination. Since very little is written, if any, about KF, nor of their history and present, I shall begin with an introduction of the community, its members, and its values and believes before discussing a suitable definition for the group.

III. A FAMILY BEYOND BLOOD RELATIONS

Konohana Farm was established in 1994 by fifteen adults and five children, who had the intention to establish an intentional community in the countryside of Fujinomiya, Shizuoka Prefecture. It was established after the community's leader, Jiji, was gathering supporters for his idea of starting a new way of living as "one big family, beyond blood relations" (from Konohana Family's official website). It was first named Konohana Farm, and later (date is unknown) the community changed its name to Konohana Family (KH). The name "Konohana" derives from the name of the Shinto goddess of Mt. Fuji, Konohana Sakuyahime no Mikoto, and the word "family" (in Japanese famiri), which is a part of its name, is indicating the leading principle of the community:

to live as one big family. As of May 2018, KH consisted of 89 members: 32 males and 57 females, which are 61 adults and 28 children. Throughout the years, about 150 people engaged in the community as members (according to current members' memory), although only recently KH established a more organized membership registration of the current and new members. The community's income now consists of a variety of channels: organic agriculture, lectures, educational programs, a cafe and shop called Lotus Land, a guesthouse, local events' food stands, monthly events, handyman services, Tanpopo healing massage and treatments clinic, and other occasional works as selling pre-ordered lunch boxes and the like. KH is also offering a 'natural therapy program' which helps individuals suffering from mental illnesses and bad habits (usually referred to substance abuse, cigarettes, and alcohol) to heal without medicines, by the spiritual guidance of Jijji and the help of the members. The work in the community is divided into teams; rice-paddy team, harvest team, seedling team, fields team, Lotus Land team, office team, child-raising team, central team (house cleaning, laundry, etc.), kitchen team, and construction team. Work is done seven days a week, since the community is "striving to live like the nature, and just as the sun will not take a day off, nor the bees, so do we need to work every day," as Jijji explained in one of the community's meetings. In the past, new members joined the community after they were introduced by a mutual acquaintance or participated in the community's activities. Later, the main channel through which new members found out about the community is via its website on the internet.

Around four years (no accurate information was found) since the community was founded they achieved self-sufficiency, which they claim to still have. Being successful in attaining self-sufficiency and cultivating microorganisms, the community started offering tours and workshops through which new potential members could be introduced to the farm. A number of interviews conducted in January and February 2018 revealed that new members who first had interest in the environmental aspects of the community did not decide to join merely for those reasons, but for the values and life-purpose that the community was offering. These values and purpose, along with the reasoning and the logic behind them, were introduced by Jijji - he is the only member in the community who introduces new beliefs and practices that the community adopts throughout the years, as well as the only member that could dismiss them when he considers them to no longer be beneficial for KH. The reason no other member could do so is simply because no one else has the ultimate certification of regular communication with the divine.

IV. A DIVINE AUTHORITY

Furuta Isami, known as Jijji, was born in Mino-city, Gifu Prefecture, in 1951. He claims that his ancestors were village leaders in Edo period, and his father was a local politician. He got married when he was 21, and at the age of 25, he and his wife founded an interior design company in Komaki city, Aichi Prefecture. They were running the company until he established Konohana Farm. Jijji tells that at the age of nineteen, his late grandmother's spirit came to sit above his head permanently [his words] and was always with him, protecting him. Eleven years later, his grandmother's spirit disappeared, and instead, a fifty-year-old Indian male took her place. Later he discovered it was Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. During this time, Jijji had an out-of-body experience in which his spirit took Buddha's body. Then, he came to realize that he switched bodies with Buddha, and Buddha was constantly seeing through his eyes and speaking through his mouth. When he was working in his interior design business, Jijji could recognize his clients' problems and gave them his insights and advice, as Buddha was speaking through his mouth. At that time, Jijji learned a technique in which he can

know people's karma. The karma is, according to KH, the Yin and Yang tendencies of a person and their capacity to realize the reality in which they live in. Via this technique, Jijji could analyze peoples' names by their kanji strokes .

One of the important points to be mentioned in Jijji's story of his spiritual journey before founding KH is his out-of-body experience in which he was floating in space and looking down at the earth. Through this experience he realized that humankind is destroying the earth "like skin cancer" (from KH recourses). Realizing this, he was determined to tell "this truth" to other people and make a change, as he felt he had the responsibility for this damage. Then, suffering from a lack of understanding by his wife and parents, Jijji continued to talk about his experiences and the "truth" which he had discovered in his spiritual journey, and gradually some people started gathering in his office every evening to listen to him. He was very lonely at that time, and just like the biblical Jonah, Jijji had a hard time to accept the path that was decided for him by the divine. He says that it was hard for him to put aside his ego and "gain-and-loss calculation and intentions." However, he could not stop what he was doing, as he realized the importance of his path.

At the age of 39, Buddha's spirit left Jijji, and he started encountering Shinto gods and goddesses; the first was Amaterasu Omikami. After this encounter, a voice told Jijji to climb to the summit of Mount Fuji before the sunrise, and when he was there, he received this message from Amaterasu Omikami: "Preach the spirit that you have learned and mastered from the divine to the whole land under the sun from now on." That was the time when he realized he should teach others how to go through the process which he went through, what he would eventually call "to polish the heart" (*kokoro wo migaku*).

After years of consulting to his clients, workers, co-workers, and their families, who had come regularly to hear him speak in his office, and went with him to shrine visits, Jijji introduced the idea of starting a community around Mount Fuji. He told them that this community will be one big family, beyond blood relations, and that it will not pollute the earth as they will be self-sufficient and will make a living via organic agriculture. Although none of the people who joined Jijji had professional background in agriculture, fourteen of them were willing to move with him to Mount Fuji. They started an organic agricultural farm, which is still one of the community's main income sources today, and were also involved in the Effective Microorganism Movement back in the 1990s and started producing their own miso and soy sauce. The place selected to start the community was an old house in Fujinomiya, a house that will soon become one out of four houses the community owns to provide members with a place to live while it continues to grow.

V. A PATH TO SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Consuming and selling organic agriculture and cultivating effective microorganisms was not the only way KH members aimed to improve the earth's condition. There was more to it than just the food, as they often explain. The success of their mission is also bound to their numerous principles when it comes to their external and internal behavior. Members need to speak up their minds and say everything they think or feel, without hiding anything, as this was and still is Jijji's explicit request. Members are constantly told that the ultimate way to polish their heart is by getting over their ego (*jiga wo koeru*). The ego, as it is explained by Jijji, is the selfish voice of a person, the consciousness that strives to promote what *I* think is good or right. The attachment to our own physical belongings, our family members, friends, as well as the attachment to our own thoughts and ideas, forms the ego, which consequently distorts our minds. In order to overcome the ego, members should not be

attached to what they think and feel, and share everything that comes up to their minds with other members in the community meetings. The same is true for the members' possessions; since the founding of KH, members were asked to share all of their money and assets with the community, as they were aiming to become one big family, and a family shares one wallet. Members who did not agree to share all their money and assets eventually left KH. This was at the beginning stage of the community and the membership process has since changed. Today, all new members need to share all of their material possessions as a preliminary request for membership.

Having no attachments is also requested when discussing family members and partners. The children of KH members are considered to be 'the children of the community.' They call all adults in their first names, regardless of their blood relations, and although some of them know who their siblings are, they should not treat them differently from other child-members. There is a designated child-raising team that is in charge of all physical needs of the children. The same no-attachment approach is also true in romantic relationships. Marriage has no meaning in KH, so a couple could be married yet have affairs with other people (not necessarily members of KH). The only factor that matters when considering a communion, a consideration that is sometimes discussed in the community meetings, is whether or not this communion will fulfill *the divine's will*. This concept is one of those that members of KH are trying to live in accordance to, as a way of getting over their ego, and eventually, improve their spiritual level.

The Divine Will

When members refer to 'the divine' in Japanese they use the words *kami sama*, which is a term that could refer to Shinto gods and goddesses, but not exclusively. Although some of the beliefs of the community are based on Shinto gods and goddesses (the name Konohana is after the name of the Shinto Goddess of Mount Fuji, and it was Amaterasu Omikami who is considered to have given Jijji the message for starting the community), there are other entities that communicate with Jijji, as the spirit of the late Nakayama Miki, founder of Tenrikyo, and the spirit of the late Mirra Alfassa, founder of Auroville, as just two examples out of many other entities he communicates with. The divine is very present in the community and is talked about every day. Everything is done since the divine is interested in it, and humans should empty themselves, or in other words, refrain from having their own thoughts or wishes, so they can listen more carefully and fulfill the divine will.

In order to know what is the will of the divine, KH members should become empty, yet not all of them could be successful in doing so. Therefore, to help members who find it hard to be attuned to the divine will and understand it, other members can directly communicate with the divine and convey messages. Jijji was the first to communicate with the divine, and he is considered the highest authority among KH members. Yet throughout the years, a few more members with channeling abilities joined KH, and they are considered as members with higher spiritual levels. One of the members who are not considered to be among those who have a direct communication with the divine told me what it was like for her to listen to the divine will :

It might not be a voice - I never heard a voice, but there is a sense. It's more like trust. There are many different patterns: Yumi [Jijji's private secretary who is considered a miko] can really feel and hear, so does Jijji. I cannot really hear anything, sometimes I sense. But just by hearing the stories of Yumi and Jijji, who really share the time together [with the divine], I really believe this is true. It is a very thin line, to me, and some people say 'cult group', but I really feel that this is really true. (January 8, 2018).

According to KH beliefs, everything is to happen according to the divine will. If something does not go well, it is considered because it is not meant to happen, as one of the members told me during an interview:

If things don't go well, even if I made the best effort - it's the divine telling me it is not the right direction. (February 21, 2018).

The path to understanding the divine will is different among the members. Some members indicated that when they just came to the community, it was hard for them to gain such 'emptiness' in order to perceive the divine's will, but later they came to understand it better:

When I just came here, I thought so many things: 'I want to change that', 'this should be changed like that.' I thought a lot and suggested a lot, but all these things just came out from my own preference or my fixed world view. At that time, things didn't change. [...] my personality - which was the source of these suggestions - was the problem. I received this feedback from other members. When I just observed [...] things gradually changed, and it went in the direction I hoped it would. It all happened [although] there was no word coming out of my mouth. It just went in this direction because of the flow. Even now, I have some thoughts like 'oh, I wish this part will become like this...', but the difference between the time I came here and now is that now I am aware of the flow. Also, now I know my wishes are not always correct. The answer is that things are becoming what they should become anyway. [...] The important thing here is the spirituality, spiritual development, and to be together with the universe. [...] then, even if there were no expectations, the energy would flow, so things manifest. [...] Before we, humans, were born, we all promised the divine to fulfill our role. And we are given that role. Our role is to improve our spirituality. Become the divine's tool which they can easily use. (February 6, 2018).

Although these members are said to gain the emptiness required to perceive the divine will, it does not mean that they could successfully and fully get over their ego. The only member who is considered to be over his ego entirely is Jijji. When interviewing the community's miko, Yumi, she was asked about the spiritual improvement of the members, and the statement she made, in which she said that it was not a good thing of her to push other KH members into spiritual improvement:

[...] I was - I used to be more pushy. I was like 'oh- you should do that' [...] like [in the name of] justice. But now I know - it doesn't work because everyone has a different will and path and determination.

When I asked her if Jijji is the one pushing the members towards it, she said:

Yes and no. If he does, it's not his will. For me - that's my will, right? Like, I want members to be like this. But for him, that's through the divine that he does that, like, due to the divine will. [...] he unconsciously kind of senses the divine will, so he kind of tells such things to the members. But not based on his will. So in such a meaning - yes and no. So it's a little different from my case. I'm more like a human. (February 12, 2018).

As the community tries to operate according to the divine will, the members who can communicate with the divine often share their experiences with those who cannot. One example of that can be found in their decision-makings. Decisions in the community are said to be consequences of mutual agreement that is achieved through discussions in the community meetings, and sometimes it is said to be decided by a non-verbal perception of the natural flow between members. On one occasion, Jijji announced at the community meeting that KH is about to purchase land behind Lotus Land, which would be an extension to the kitchen. He explained that it is necessary

because recently there are many international guests, care guests (participants in the natural therapy program), and new members, and that the kitchen of the Lotus Land is very small. He mentioned that Lotus Land is important for the community, and the community is important, so they have to do their best for KH to continue growing. The land would cost around 10,000,000 JPY, and he already negotiated with the landowner, who would not reduce the price because he is in debt. Jijji also announced that because the community had many expenses this year, the contract will be signed in January. It was Jijji who made the negotiation with the landowner and eventually decided to buy the land. When I asked some members if they knew about the issue of buying the land, they said they did, but they had no idea about the details like price or the content of the negotiation, but only after it was decided. They trust Jijji that he will fulfill the divine will. He is the one who got over his ego after being a disciple of Buddha for nine years, and therefore he is empty and can receive messages from the divine. Jijji is also the one who can tell the members how they can improve their spirituality by analyzing the characteristics of a person with two different tools that he claims to have received from Buddha. The first is the karma reading I mentioned earlier, and the second is the Heliocentric Calendar.

VI. PERSONALITY ANALYSIS

In KH, learning the personality of a person is based on two analyzing methods, explained by Jijji as ‘the driver and the vehicle’. The karma of a person, which implies their personality’s characteristics, is known as ‘the driver’, who is navigating the vehicle. The Heliocentric Calendar (HC) implies the set of abilities the person is born with and is known as ‘the vehicle’ that the driver is navigating. Understanding these two tools could help a person recognize why certain events occur in their lives and navigate through them in order to reach better results. Every current or potential member, care-guest, or sometimes guests and researchers like the author will have their names and date of birth analyzed.

Karma Reading

Without getting into the Kanji strokes calculations and details of the analysis itself, the basics of the karma analysis refers to *yin and yang*: according to KH, *yin* people are supposed to have the tendency to be passive and modest, consider matters negatively or carefully, dependent, harmonious, introverted, thoughtful, and act carefully. Thus, their action tends to produce fruitful results. On the other hand, *yang* people are supposed to have the tendency to be less careful and positive, problematic, independent, active, self-righteous, having strong desire for self-realization and development. However, it is also said that not all of these characteristics will manifest in a *yin* or *yang* person and that different tendencies might be observed with different people. Moreover, it was also noted that some people do not show typical *yin/yang* characteristics according to their tendency because they try to hide it. It is also said that there is a “neutral” personality, of not *yin* nor *yang*, which the people who have it are more relaxed and focused on themselves (retrieved from KH presentation “learning the personality” presented in February 2018).

Karma Reading (*karuma yomi*) also analyses the ‘capacity’ of a person’s personality, or, what they are able or unable to comprehend in life, as well as their perspective, simply by the count of the person’s first name’s Kanji letters, and the name’s strokes number. The higher the stroke number is, the bigger capacity of the person to think deeply about things. Regarding the kanji letters count of the given name, a person with only one kanji letter has a very narrow perspective and can only see things from his own point of view. Two kanjis implies the person can also see from others’ point of view, and three letters both of the former qualities, as well as an objec-

-tive perspective.

KH members often use karma in order to explain the way a person acts and why their own personality has one tendency or another. One of the members told me about his tendency, explained by his karma:

I am kind of congenital-to-be-depressed person. [...]. My tendency is a little Yin. I am minus 1.

When I asked him how does he know he was born to be depressed he answered:

Oh, that's because Jijji told me. So I am close to 0, to neutral, so I'm in a very good balance, but it is minus 1, so I understand what I have to do, but since I am minus 1, I cannot really put it into action, and I think a lot. Then I get frustrated and become depressed. So that's what minus 1 means. (February 9, 2018).

A female members also tried to explain why it was her karma that eventually led her husband to commit suicide:

I feel that my tendencies – until I came here I really... hum... I thought I was only doing good things. When I came here, I understood better my tendencies and habits, since everyone had told me that. Then I realized I should try to fix these patterns until they disappear and to improve myself. It would have been good for my former-husband.

When I asked her what does she means, she replied:

When my husband died, at the [community] meeting, we discussed that issue. At that time, I realized that if I'd change myself, it will be like a commemorative ceremony [kuyō] devoted to my former-husband. [...] He committed the suicide, [and] I was told by the members that the habits of my husband and myself brought him to this state – the suicidal state. I felt like I cannot stay like that, and I had to change.

I then asked her what has changed in her during the time she is a member of KH. Her answer was:

I am a 3-letter-Yang, so my ego is very strong. For example, even if I think that something is good for others, it might be only from my point of view. I have repeated that, and members pointed it out, so I realized that. I feel I should remove my big ego, and then I can live my daily life. But still, my ego is still very strong. (January 23, 2018).

Karma reading is brought up daily and regularly in the community, and many times I heard phrases such as: *Hiroko is doing everything very fast, and she doesn't think much before she acts because she has two letters Yang.* The members' karma is known to all, just like the members' age or the city and prefecture they are originally from. Once in a few years, Jijji makes a presentation in which he explains to the children-members about some aspects of the community's spirituality and beliefs. In the karma reading presentation I attended, Jijji was analyzing the children's names one by one. The following analysis is of a junior high school girl:

Three letters Yin type is a kind of rare. So she thinks a lot, but she is passive, and she tends to think in a negative way. She has many worries, so if she goes out to the society, she might get depressed. [...]. Thinking is a burden for her. If she receives a piece of good advice, though, she can be smart, so it was good for you [talking to the girl] you encountered me [Jijji]. She is minus three, and Jijji is plus 4, so the relationship is very good. So you and Jijji are spiritual partners, and if you want to make the best of yourself, it is a good partnership. (February 17, 2018).

For KH members, it is very natural to use karma reading in order to analyze situations. However, the term karma is used in other situations as well. One example of this is KH rule 1:100, which emphasizes the responsibility of each member to any situation they are involved in. It calls members to reflect over themselves, or in other words, *polish the heart*, whenever they are involved in a problematic situation. One of the members explained:

According to KH, I would say a KH rule, so if you are in a situation - like legally you have no responsibility - but you are in this situation, and your car was kind of broken or damaged, [...] and your body might have damage, that means that your karma has attracted this kind of situation. So that means, even if legally you don't have any kind of [legal] responsibility, and you don't have to pay to the person, you are in such trouble or a problematic situation, so it means you have to reflect on the pollution in your mind. That means one [1]. That means whatever happens to you – we should reflect on ourselves to improve our spirituality. That's the meaning of this rule 1 versus 100 [hyaku tai ichi]. So whatever happens to you is just the reflection of your mind. (February 12, 2018).

The number one represents the member who face a bad situation, while the number one hundred represents the possibilities of the karma. The idea behind it is that negative situations that happens to the member are always their fault, even if they did not do any physical action. It is their fault since they attracted the karma leading to this situation through their minds, which makes them responsible.

Karma is a term that received a new interpretation in the community and has been widely used. The theory of karma reading was introduced to Jijji by the divine when he was “*spiritually ready*,” in his words. In 2011, after the Great East Japan Earthquake, and after Jijji was celebrating his sixty’s birthday in a ceremony that KH refers to as ‘the living funeral’, Jijji is said to be given a new theory from the divine, this time based on astrology.

Heliocentric Calendar (HC)

Just like any astrological theory, the HC is based on the belief that the positions of stars in the Milky Way at a certain time can explain a set of the abilities a person has. Each star has its own meaning, and it is divided into three groups; **mind** represented by Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars. **Social relations** by Jupiter and Saturn. And **spirituality** by Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto (from KH explanation sheet). The data of the stars’ position at a given time is taken from the NASA database. The HC analysis is executed in order “*to analyze a person’s life from the planetary map of the solar system based on his/her birthday and time, know the mission given by the universe, and analyze his/her own mental structure and social tendency*” (from KH community’s materials), and is done by drawing a map of the stars’ position on a certain date and time. The angles the stars create between each other has a meaning, and the meaning could be seen in the lines drawn between them (see figure 1). A solid line means that the star’s qualities function fully, so the person in question has these abilities, a dotted line means that the star functions partially, and no line means that the characteristics that this star represents do not exist. In KH beliefs, these qualities are created since the planets communicate with each other by vibrancy (*hibiki*), rotation, and harmony.

There is also a meaning to the generation the person was born to, as it is said that individuals from the same generation tend to share the same values. The year duration of a given generation is decided by the orbit of Pluto since KH believe this planet represents “the flow of the era” (*jidai no nagare*). The generations are called in

names of zodiac signs, and every two consecutive generations form an era; the generations between 1883-1913 (Gemini) and 1913-1938 (Cancer) caused the two world wars and represents the *Era of Darkness*, 1938-1957 (Leo) and 1957-1971 (Virgo) represents the era of *Postwar Recovery & Prosperity*, 1971-1984 (Libra) and 1984-1995 (Scorpio) represent the *Bridging Generation*, and finally, 1995-2008 (Sagittarius) and 2008-2024 (Capricorn) are expected to be the *Generation of Peak of Light* who will create a harmonious world.

The HC analysis is not in everyday use as the karma reading, and the only times when members discussed an HC of a person was when a new care-guest came. Since these guests are seeking mental help, KH members turn to the HC to explain the guest's mental structure and social involvement, or, in their words, to understand what is the 'vehicle' that the person is 'driving', so they can know better how they can help this care-guest to heal.

While karma reading and HC are tools to understand the person's personality in order for them to know their weak and strong points and adjust their mental and physical behavior to eventually get over the ego and be more attentive to the divine's will, KH also developed another tool that would help the community to *improve the flow*, and improve the atmosphere and energy in every action they are doing. This tool is not said to be a KH original tool as karma reading and the HC, but was introduced to them by non-members and was adopted and adjusted to KH needs according to their understanding. This tool, the Katakamuna, is practiced by all members a few times every day, from the time they learn how to speak.

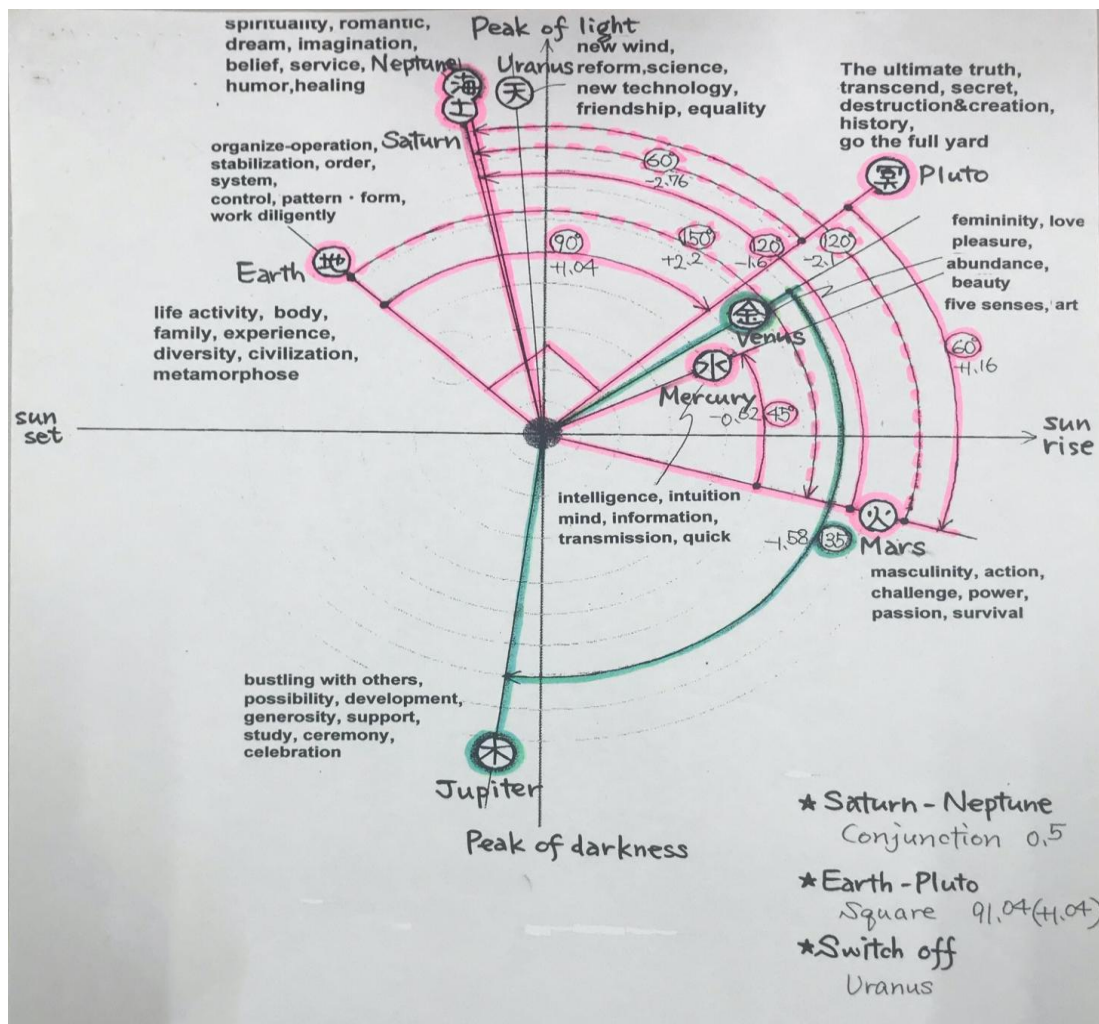


Fig. 1. Heliocentric Calendar analysis. This chart was made for one of the guests in the community during November 2017.

VII. KATAKAMUNA

The Katakamuna was introduced to KH in 2014 by a teacher specializing in it. The members claimed that after a few classes, they realized that they understand the Katakamuna better than this teacher and therefore dismissed him and developed their own learning materials. Then, they started to develop the Katakamuna theory based on the previous teacher’s explanations and expanded it. The original theory of the Katakamuna is based on the myth that 13,000 years ago, Japan was inhabited by people called the Katakamuna People, who are, according to the KH, the ancestors of nowadays Japanese. People of this civilization could sense the potential of a phenomenon prior to its existence. Therefore, in the Katakamuna theory, there is a constant tension, dependence, and interaction between *the potential world* and *the phenomena world*, which will be further explained in the next paragraph. The vibrancy of the potential world could be sensed by the Katakamuna people, and they classified these vibrations into 48 sounds (syllables), which allegedly represents the system of which the universe is operated by: the universal structure of creation, development, and disappearance. It is said that for many years the Katakamuna theory was hidden from human beings because humans were far from a spiritual state that can support the understanding of the Katakamuna, but in 1949, a physicist named Narasaki Satsuki discovered the Katakamuna and revealed its’ mystery during five years of research.

The name Katakamuna derives from the transformation of vibrancy from *the potential world*, the world of *kamu* (refers to *kami*, the divine), to *the phenomena world*, the world of *kata* (refers to the shape, or existence), and *na*, which is the shift from one world to the other. A simple example of this process would be human’s life: before one was born, one’s spirit is in the *kamu* world, which is *the potential world*. After the birth, the spirit is going through a qualitative shift, which is the *na*, and then the individual is born – and become a phenomenon in the world of *kata*, which is the *phenomena* world. After the individual dies, the spirit will go again through a qualitative shift (*na*) and return to the world of *kamu*, the *potential* world. This process is said to happen in all phenomena we can observe, like thoughts becoming actions, the influence of our words, or any other aspect of life.

Each of the 48 syllables that are said to create the vibrancy of the *potential* world has a meaning (see table 1). There are eighty chants that KH is familiar with. One of them is chanted daily by the community members, while others are chanted on special occasions. KH doctrines notes that most of the Katakamuna chants are regarding sexual relations between men and women. The sounds are parallel to the Japanese katakana sounds, and therefore, by looking at the meaning of the syllables of the Katakamuna, it is possible to analyze Japanese words and names. Just like karma reading, KH uses the Katakamuna to analyze people’s personalities by their names as well. Without going into further explanations about names and words analysis, according to this theory, there are ‘distorted sounds’ which implies ‘distorted thinking’ by the person.

Table 1. Katakamuna Syllables’ Meanings (five out of 48 syllables).

㇀HI	One (hitotsu), secret (hisoka), to open (hiraku), to echo (hibiku), light (hikari), day (hi), fire (hi), sun (hi), a starting point from stillness to motion, the beginning of things.
㇁HU	Two (futatsu), to vibrate (furueru), to touch (fureru), deep (fukai), to fill / block (fusagu), to bend down (fusu), to increase (fueru), to swell (fukuramu), to gain weight (futoru), a stage where two contradictory characteristics that expand and contract spread as fluctuation.
㇂MI	Fill (michiru); water (mizu); honeydew (mitsu); path (michi); body (mi); something in Sensho-kado (Ama-kai: the world

	between the potential world and the phenomenal world); something consisting of electricity, magnetism and force; something that you cannot see, but can feel with your mind.
YO	Evil (yokoshima); confusion; world (yo); night (yoru); to get drunk (you); a state where energy was divided into Sei Han (forward and reverse) at the stage HU, went beyond the stage MI, developed into forward and reverse further, flowed evilly, and became a rotating vortex flow.
I	Position (ichi); the first particle that appears in the phenomenal world; something combining five physical elementary quantum components of electricity, magnetism, force, time and place; the energy of I is uneven and has differences (SA), and this is called ISA meaning "Let's do it."

The community mostly chants Katakamuna chants number 5 and 6^{viii}. Some of these chants have a meaning in Japanese, for example: "*hi fu mi yo i*" - is an old Japanese counting for one-two-three-four-five, although not in use anymore in modern Japan, and "*ma wa ri te me ku ru*" - meaning "seasons are changing". The members, adults, and children, say chant number 5 and 6 before their meetings. Adults also chant when they work, when fermenting microorganisms, and sometimes on random occasions. The members explain that children should chant it too since it develops their pineal gland, so every child in the community is required to chant as soon as he or she can developmentally do so. KH members believe that chanting *adjusts the atmosphere* of their meetings, so it will be successful and fruitful, and that *everyone would have one mind and heart*.

While some members told the author the history of the Katakamuna and the meaning behind it, other members seem to not know what it is exactly. When the author asked one of the adult members what Katakamuna is, she replied:

A new but old thing, so it is very interesting. I didn't know Katakamuna at all, but if we'd just put a Japanese word we can know its' real meaning. Since the ancient times, there has been such knowledge, and now KH encountered Katakamuna and analyzed those things. It is so great. I don't know about Katakamuna so much, but there are people from outside the community who studied Katakamuna. Their Katakamuna and KH's Katakamuna are totally different. (January 17, 2018).

Other adult member, whom I asked the same question, replied:

It's a very broad world view... what can I say? KH itself got to know about Katakamuna, and since then, the capacity its expanded. I understand that this is something important, but I still didn't grasp it well enough. (January 23, 2018).

A third member with whom I discussed the Katakamuna said he was chanting it *for my adjustment, for myself. When I do my daily work I tend to forget what is really important, so this is the time to remember [...]. That is why I feel that this is important. That is why I practice.* (January 21, 2018).

Although some members do not know well about the Katakamuna, they do understand that it is important and that by practicing it, their spiritual level and the harmony in the community could be improved. While a comprehensive understanding of KH's different beliefs is one aspect and implementing practices in order to get over one's ego is another, the members who are highly evaluated in these two aspects are perceived to have a higher spirituality, which forms an unwritten spiritual hierarchy in the community.

VIII. SPIRITUAL RANKING

The spiritual levels of members are not given by numbers or ordinary scale but is more of a vague evaluation.

According to their explanations, it is important to evaluate one's spirituality to help one improve and develop. For the same reason, members are constantly told by other members about their 'bad habits', destructive tendencies, immaturity, and bad performances in their work. The latter is the ultimate test for high spiritual level: if the member did not perform well in their work, it is said to be an outcome of low spirituality since the spirit is tuning the actions and their outcomes. It seems that all members know what their spiritual rank is and act in accordance with it. Quite often, members declare: "*I have a big ego*", "*...this is because I didn't get over my ego yet*", and similar statements. KH members believe that the best practice to get over their ego is to forget about the self and live only for others. The only person who reached this level of spirituality is Jijji, and he is the only member who can explicitly tell other members' spiritual level. In the community meetings which I attended, Jijji was implying, mocking, or scolding different members for their low spiritual levels, which was mainly noticed by their bad performances or mistakes in their work. Whether it is higher spirituality that improves the members' function or the higher function that improves members' spiritual level, is left as a chicken or egg paradox.

Although members do not use numbers or any other symbol to know their spiritual level, there is a clear hierarchy, and members who are closer to Jijji are those with higher spirituality. His secretary, Yumi, is one of the members who are said to have the highest spirituality, and as mentioned earlier, is considered a miko. When asked about her relations with Jijji compare to other members, she said:

I guess I'm the closest, like spiritually, because I can understand the most what he said and I can sense the importance, and as in my spiritual path I kind of received many messages and visions from the divine, which is so different from other members too. Not many other members have direct contact with the divine, right? Like Jijji and I do. (February 12, 2018).

When discussing members' spiritual level, tools such as karma reading or the HC cannot assess it. While KH members say that anyone can tell a person's spiritual level if they observe the person, the members trust Jijji as the ultimate authority. When asked about how to assess a person's spiritual level, Yumi replied:

[...] we can sense it. That's why Jijji says he always gives marks to the members because he can sense without such tools [karma reading and HC], [but] with intuition, with vibrancy. He can sense, I can sense, maybe you can sense that too. 'That person is this level or that level' – we can tell. I can sense from their atmosphere, vibrancy, and from their words and actions. And the consistency between their words and actions. We can sense it. (February 12, 2018)

The spiritual levels of all members, guests, care guests, or even celebrities and other people who are not related to KH are often discussed in the community meetings, work time, and daily conversations. The spiritual level of the parents will also determine the spiritual level of the baby who will be born from their sexual intercourse. Communion that occur in KH should resonate with the divine's will since the community is striving to beget children with high spirituality that will improve the spiritual level of the society in the future. Jijji made a nine hour presentation called *sex and the universe* in which he describes in details the process of life-creation by the Katakamuna, while *beautiful sex* (as opposed to *polluted sex*) is a spiritual state that "*indicated the fundamental principles of the universe.*" Then, in order to express the right sex, "*It is necessary for people who have reached a certain level to enhance the partner's conscious level and convey the mystery of sex gradually.*" One of the times this kind of conscious level was conveyed was a controversial ceremony that was held in 2013 or 2014 (according to the members' memory), and was called a sex purification ceremony, *sei*

misogi.

IX. PURIFICATION CEREMONIES

According to a newspaper article published in June 2014 (see Nifty Kokorogu in the references), Jijji had sexual relationship with more than half of the female members of KH, while some of them were against their will while these women explicitly requested him to stop. No charges against rape were filled since the alleged victims never complained. This occasion was a part of the *sei misogi* ceremony that the community was executing. As a part of this ceremony, key figures in KH were asked by Jijji to write all of their sexual histories and hand them to him. Those who had *polluted sex habits* were pointed out by Jijji in the community meetings and were called to change their ways. *Polluted sex habits* are said to not be in accordance with the divine will, and therefore will increase the pollution of the earth. For that reason, it was important for Jijji to compel these members to cease these bad habits immediately. One of the times, Jijji used physical violence against male members (they are no longer members of KH). A current members explains it:

[...] in order to correct people's perception, Jijji was hitting people often.[...] Since it was so very important - that is why. A person who is violating this importance and make things dirty; these people were hit until Jijji's hand hurt - it happened so many times. (February 10, 2018).

Another member described it as follows:

Now, on the internet, it is written that he [Jijji] was violent, but at the beginning, he was really caring and thinking about the person when he hit those people. [...]. Even before this case had happened, a couple of times, Jijji really cared about some members and would do it, but it depends on the member: how they perceive it will determine if it's violence. If [the member who was hit] would stay here, he would think that it is a totally natural thing to happen, but because he couldn't really stay here, he left. That's why he kind of says that it was violence. These days Jijji is almost not doing it anymore, the generation had changed, and the era has changed. (February 20, 2018).

Some of the assaulted former-members sued Jijji. At the time of my departure from the community, the case was still unclosed.

Regarding the accusation of rape, Jijji was explaining the situation and why he considered it as an educational act:

"I demonstrated what is beautiful sex and what is polluted sex. I did it because it was important to me. [...] what is sacred and what is polluted - it depends on the spiritual level of the person behind it. That's why we know what is polluted and sacred. So depending on what spirituality is behind the sex, the sex could be sacred or polluted. At that time [the time of the sei-misogi], everyone understood what is sacred and what is polluted [...]. [...] in detail, there is sacred sex and stupid sex, so they need to experience what is what [...]. [...] I understood the importance of it by intuition and practiced it. I had some partners that I could create such important things with. [...] There are people with lower-level [of spirituality], so it's a kind of individual path [of development][...]. I have a wife, [...], but unfortunately her spiritual level didn't reach such a state. But she understands that I have other partners that have reached such a level that can create such a partnership. [...] The right order is created by the spiritual level of the female members [...]. That's why, if the spiritual level of

the female is low, the male would also express a low level. So in this sense, living together in a community will become very dangerous, because it might create a disordered place. A community might collapse due to money and sex - that's what occurred in the past in many communities. So people with disordered minds, [...] they have a spiritual level of sex as low as the general people [...]. [...] So to [two female members], I demonstrated to them what was polluted sex, and what is precious sex [...]. [...] I just demonstrated for people that have a lower sexual level. [...] That's why, for people that don't understand the sacredness of sex, when I demonstrated such sacred sex and polluted sex to the members, they thought that it's rape. So that's why they said 'it's like rape' because it wasn't raping because there weren't any victims in this situation.[...]”^{ix} (February 20, 2018).

Sexual relations should only be made, then, when receiving a divine certification, or as KH members describe it, as a ceremonial act, and not merely to seek pleasure, although not all of them are considered as an act of purification. While the *sei misogi* is only done on special occasions (the only occasion the members mentioned was the one held in 2013 or 2014), other ceremonies are done more often: there are annual ceremonies in the community, as the Fuji Sengen Festival the community holds every January, seedling and harvesting ceremonies that are common in Japan, and a KH version for the *Setsubun* on February, when KH members invite both good spirits as well as demons (*fuku wa uchi, oni mo uchi*), as they believe that the demons are nothing but a mirror to ourselves and help us improve; and on a full moon and new moon, the community celebrate by drinking *omiki* that is produced in the community.

There are also daily purification ceremonies, like the Katakamuna chant that is done daily, and a hand gestures ceremony, called “four claps”, that is usually done before a meal, although not solely. The hand gestures ceremony was introduced by Jijji, and it represents the law of the universe. It is said that the one who performs it knows the universal structure and is harmonizing with the divine. The ceremony is also held before conducting any work that involves microorganisms, as preparing the *koji* with the rice, or stirring the soy sauce, as one of KH principles is to treat well all the living things that human share the earth with, microorganisms included. It is for that reason why the community members do not buy meat and dairy (while they can eat if they receive them), and it is also the reason why community practices organic agriculture – to not pollute the earth and human body. However, when it comes to other practices the community maintains, these values could be dismissed. It will only last if it serves KH's spiritual goals.

X. ENVIRONMENTALISM

Working seven days a week, as animals, plants, the sun, and all other elements in the natural world is only one way in which KH is trying to pursue harmony with the nature. The community also has a recycling station for cardboards, solar panels, and two compost toilets in their outdoor facilities. The community can be found on the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) website, and many researchers worldwide who are interested in environmentalism and community operation had visited during the last few years. However, the community did not intend to become an ecovillage but until a female member who was previously involved in the Ecovillage Network became a member. One of the members who founded the community together with Jijji said they did not even know the words “community” or “ecovillage” before this female member joined. They called themselves ‘a farm’, and practiced organic agriculture (*yuki nogyo*), but they did not use the word “organic” in the English pronunciation as they do today. Yet after this member joined, KH realized some of their practices are similar to ecovillages when it comes to farming. Putting aside spirituality, both KH and ecovillages are base-

-d on organic agriculture and the aspiration to improve the environment.

Environmental Practices

Selling organic products is not merely the outcome of environmental concern and one of the community's main income sources, but also a mean to spread KH's beliefs and values. Therefore, they see great importance in improving their spirituality in order for the production to be of high quality. In order to transcend positive energy and making better products, members often chant Katakamuna while working in the fields, kitchen, warehouses, and other places. Then, growing healthy, organic, and delicious-looking food is equivalent to spreading their spiritual beliefs and practices to the external society, a mission they highly evaluate. Since the distribution of their values and spiritual beliefs takes priority, other practices that might contradict environmentalism might be executed. If organic food needs to be delivered in one-time-use plastic packages, the ends justify the means.

One of the members, who was running a soba stand prior to his membership, but closed it since he wanted to refrain from producing a lot of plastic, explained why in KH it is different:

[...] My tendency is to be very extreme. I'm often told that I am a person of either 0 or 100. Nothing in between. That's why when I think about things - I don't have anything in the middle. So I have lived my life always using nothing at all or using a lot! KH is flexible. According to the need, we change. So talking about lunch boxes, we are going to make it as good as we can and do the best we can do. So rather than doing workshops here for a few people, if we're doing lunch boxes for hundreds of people, the same values would be distributed. It is easier to understand our values like that. Not doing that for the reason we might create garbage is not good. We will make lunch boxes on any opportunity we have. And then, on other occasions, you can have this kind of food in A-UN [monthly soba restaurant event that the community was holding] and at the Lotus Land. Both of them are the same food. If I start to think, 'we produce so much garbage', this is my ego talking. That's why it's bad to refrain from plastic usage because by using it, we can distribute our values. We distribute our values via delicious lunch boxes. When I reflect back over myself, what I have done by saying 'I won't pollute the earth' – that was very superficial. (February 21, 2018).

A similar explanation was also provided for the usage of plastic for packing KH's organic products, the plastic mulch in the fields, and for the self-consumption of plastic when drinking *omiki* and making lunch boxes for community trips. The plastic is not recycled since Fujinomiya has no plastic recycling facilities. However, the community stated that it is burned in a facility that has very little pollution.

A serious concern for pollution is shown in a different area: pollution of the body. KH is striving to eliminate the consumption of foods that contain "bad energy", in particular: meat and fish. The community considers the stressful experiences of animals while being slaughtered to be the cause of bad energy in meat and fish since this energy makes the body unhealthy in their perspective. They also assert that the intestine of Japanese people is one meter longer than any other people, which causes the meat to stay longer in their bodies and rotten. The ultimate verification that meat should not be consumed was made by Jijji. He said that in one of his out-of-body experiences, in which he was flying in space and watching the earth, he noticed the earth was surrounded by the sad souls of dead animals killed for the food industry. The food should be produced in a harmless way and to be appreciated by its eater before it is consumed. Therefore, in KH, all food should be consumed after praying in s-

-ilence for at least one minute and saying *itadakimasu* a few times.

Yet the community is raising chickens for egg consumption and manure, while the old chickens are sold to a chicken-dealer. According to one of the members, “*the dealer is probably using the old chickens to feed carnivores in a zoo.*” Also, although the community is not buying milk for self-consumption, they do consume it for the food and drinks offered in their café. Then, although another member said she was working in the milk industry and was not happy with the treatment the cows had received, here too, the means for financial profit is prioritized over the care for animal welfare in the food industry, which the community is said to be concerned by.

A Fishhook

Although agriculture is one of the main source of income of KH and the practice the community is most recognized with, the treatment of their crops also has a spiritual aspect. They believe that the energy that they transmit to the crops is what makes them delicious, and if they would transcend negative energy, the crops will feel it and get sick or die. Here too, the spiritual level of the member is inspected by their success in their work. Bad work implies on a low spiritual level or deviated mind. One of the members described how it was like working in the field with Jiji on the first years on the community:

At the beginning, I worked with Jiji in the vegetable fields, and while working in the fields, for example, we drew the line that we should plant according to. If I plant away from the line we had drawn, he would say that my spirit is deviant - and I should straighten it. [...] In the beginning, I made our chicks die a lot. If I could not really observe chicken well or if I am not feeling completely one with them, then [it means] I am in an unstable condition. That's why Jiji really scolded me. (February 19, 2018).

Another member explained that it is all a matter of consciousness: “*If we plant something, it has to be straight. If it would deviate, even in just a little bit, Jiji would say ‘your mind deviates’.* [...] *Rather than being hard on us, that was just for being conscious about what we are doing*” (February 20, 2018). These experiences of the members elaborate on the process of improving spirituality through improvement in work. The next step would be to transcend this spirituality through the products the community is selling, as presented in the previous section.

KH is not only self-sufficient in terms of food, but it also has an impressive production scale in variety and quantity of organic agricultural products, with fertilizers based on neem, zeolite, and calcium. However, community members constantly emphasize that organic food is secondary to spiritual development in terms of importance. On the first day in KH, I was told by two different members that the community *is not all about the food, but about learning one's heart (kokoro wo manabu)*. Therefore, despite the fact that the community is registered as an ecovillage, its' first priority is their spirituality. Still, the community was attracting many new members via their environmental practices. Some members came to KH out of environmental interest; they heard that it is an ecovillage and decided to join, came to visit after hearing about it from *Chikyu-Mura* NPO that promotes environmental education, were introduced to it via a mailing list about environmental protection, received help from KH with their organic-agriculture initiation, came on a tour which introduced organic farming, or simply searched online for information about sustainable living. All of these people came to KH in the first place because they were interested in environmentalism and agriculture. Two members joined after they

encountered KH when participating in its past program, EDE (Ecovillage Design workshop). However, the EDE, supervised by Gaia Education^X, is no longer held in the community as Gaia Education forbid KH to hold it after they learned about the violence accusation against KH. Since then, KH refrains from being called an ecovillage and offers their own educational program, called The Truth School (*shingakko*), where they teach mainly about spirituality and community living, as well as organic agriculture practices. The new definition KH adopted is A Village of Bodhisattvas (*bosatsu no sato*), since they believe it emphasizes the idea of spirituality they want to convey to the society, unlike the term ecovillage.

Although some members were attracted to the community for environmental reasons, all of them admit that the reason they stay in the community is for spiritual reasons since they learned that it is the most important thing. A female member explained:

When I just came, spirituality wasn't that important [for me]. I wanted to have physical things: solar panels, eco-houses, nice food, and self-sufficiency - those kinds of things. Because of this attitude, in [the] meeting, someone pointed out that my spirit and ego is having a problem. At that time, I was thinking, 'why do you say that? You don't know me!', and I was very angry in the beginning. I didn't have a good attitude to learn. I took things very negatively. I was angry for the first six months until I started to feel 'oh, maybe they are saying something that is good for me because there is no point for them to tell me such a thing'. I just realized that. [But] still, it's so slow to realize such a thing. (January 8, 2018).

One of the main channels through which potential new members can come to learn about the community's practices and KH's farming and community living is through the community's website. It was built as a recruitment tool for new members and is filled with pictures of the fields at the foot of Mount Fuji, the delicious-looking plant-based meals, and the adult and children members smiling while doing various activities. One of the members explained to me the significance of the website for the community: *[...] at some point we needed to transmit our values to the external society, so we built the website – and it was like a fishhook, so the necessary people had come here. (January 22, 2018).* However, just as a fishhook would not be effective if one did not consider the sea conditions, such as season, weather, and fish tendencies, there are various reasons why individuals join a spiritual community at a certain time and in certain conditions, which are not related to the community itself. To understand why a given community gains popularity at a certain point in time, it is also important to look into the external social, economic, and political contexts in which this community is operating in.

XI. PUTTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEXT

KH is explicitly refraining from calling itself a religion, a religious organization, or to be identified with any existing religion. Although there are clear religious characteristics to the community, as beliefs in kami, Buddha, and even having a *miko* and a Shinto priest (*kannushi*) in the community, to name just a few, KH calls itself *a village of Bodhisattvas* and defines itself as a sustainable spiritual community that focuses on polishing the heart and improving its members' spirituality. While the practices KH offers, such as Katakamuna chanting, hand gestures, and misogi are not documented in any other place, spiritual development as an ideal to strive for is far from being unique to this community alone. The idea of personal spiritual growth was well known for many years before KH was established; since the late 1970s, spirituality was gaining popularity in Japan, and during the 1980s and the 1990s, themes referring to the alternation of the mind and spirit as well as self-searching

related topics were gathered under the umbrella term The Spiritual World (*seishin sekai*) (Shimazono & Graf, 2012, p. 460). One of the explanations offered to the growing interest in spirituality was the rising demand for knowledge and practices which are not religious nor scientific (Shimazono & Graf, 2012, p. 477), which religious organizations could not fill by definition. Some of the practices that were offered by the spiritual world writers tried to fill the gap with ideas of getting over the ego and initiations of organic agriculture. These ideas might have prepared the ground for the acceptance of New Age beliefs and new environmental ideologies or communal living for the aim of spiritual growth.

The political and economic state of Japan has also been evident as a significant influence in the quest of individuals after spiritual guidance. Prominent examples of new religions flowering were after the Meiji restoration, Japan's militarization in the 1920s and 1930s, at the end of World War II, and since the 1970s (Prohl, 2012, p. 241-264), in the time of Japan's economic growth. While only a few studies on spiritual and religious movements after the 1990s have been made, one can assume that the economic stagnation of Japan during the 1990s led to income insecurity, which in turn caused multiple social and mental instabilities, resulting in a high suicide rate, would urge individuals to search for a new solution to their economic, social, personal, and mental problems. While neither NRM nor NNR offers practical economic resolutions, KH stands out in the crowd. Its Kibbutz-like economy could give an answer to economic concerns accompanied by a community you interact with daily and the promise of personal spiritual guidance that is refraining from being called religious as religions' reputation has largely descended during the second half of the 1990s.

Following the terrorist attack of Aum Shinrikyo in 1995, other new religions in Japan suffered from a negative image, regardless of their size (Prohl, 2012, p. 255). In a survey conducted on Japanese college students after the Aum incident, only twenty per cent responded positively to the item "do you believe in religion?" (Dorman, 2012, p. 515). The public was reluctant from any religious organization and questioned their intentions. If KH ever intended to register as a religious organization, even merely for tax benefits, it was clear at that time they will then meet extreme difficulties recruiting new members and front high suspiciousness from the public authorities. However, with the existing public interest in spirituality and decreasing trust in organized religions, the public need for alternative spiritual guidance could now be fulfilled by a non-religious entity. Although it is unclear if KH was a product of the circumstances or accidentally found an organization that would perfectly fit the post-Aum era, they offered non-religious spirituality that some parts of the public were eager to consume.

With 60 to 70 per cent of the college students in the survey mentioned above claim they do believe in Shinto gods and goddesses, Buddha, spirits, souls, supernatural phenomena, destiny, and retribution for past deeds (Dorman, 2012, p. 514), and yet most of them did not define themselves as religious, it is clear that there is a question of the definition of religion and religious, be it an established religion as Buddhism and Shinto, or newer NRM and NNR. As KH's validity in the eyes of its members leans on the spiritual relations of its leader with the Buddha, and Shinto gods and goddesses, it is difficult to dismiss KH as non-religious. Yet this debate was answered by Shimazono & Graf (Shimazono & Graf, 2012, p. 484), as the participants in the non-religious new spirituality movements perceive religion as more restrictive, impersonal, and institutionalized, three traits which are not suitable for KH. Even when discussing the divine will, it is hard to tell where to draw the line between the religious context of it and the cultural-secular treatment of 'a supernatural force beyond our control'.

Therefore, with no prior scholarly research, to decide what definition will be best suited for KH, it is beneficial to examine its similarities to other spiritual groups that were long-studied and defined.

XII. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Spiritual development that aims to improve the individual's well-being is at the center of KH members' goals and practices. Only when individuals will get over their ego can they form a harmonious atmosphere and contribute to the creation of a better world. They are trying to do so through two channels. The first is mental: releasing all attachments and getting over their ego while listening to the divine will. And the second is physical: perfecting their work, chanting, hand gestures, participating in rituals like misogi, living as a community, and donating all their money and assets to the community. This division is based on what an external observer *can see and cannot see*. Both channels are based on the belief in self-improvement for the sake of the society and the world.

Rituals that aim to improve the world through individual practice are common in NNR and can be seen in Agonshū (Reader, 1988, p. 256), and both Sukyo Mahikari and Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyodan that strive for an individual based salvation (Tsukada, 2012, p. 143). The notion that the individual is at the center is common among NNR, as oppose to NRM, as mentioned in (Prohl, 2012), but unlike spirituality per se, in NNR, the group is the mean through which the individual is improved, whether it is by spiritual guidance, work, ceremonies, or other practices. In this sense, KH is somewhat different: while in NRM, the desire is to improve the welfare of the group, and in the NNR, the motivation is to improve the individual's well-being, in KH, the basic idea is that individuals improve themselves in order to forget about their own 'self' and live solely for the sake of the group. Therefore, the community is not only functioning as a means for the individual to achieve an improvement in their spiritual level, but also an entity to strive for its welfare, with the faith that it will, in turn, improve the spiritual level of the whole society. And as in other groups, the immediate Japanese society will be the world society savior.

Japanese centralism is present in different religious groups in Japan, as Sukyō Mahikari, Agonshū, Byakkō Shinkokai, and Kofuku no Kagaku, to mention a few. While KH's nationalism stands in line with other groups, its innovation is in the development and belief of a divine mission as the descendants of an ancient civilization that is neither Shintoist nor Buddhist - the Katakamuna civilization. As KH's nationalism is based on an ancient mythological Japan, with the purpose of reviving this civilization's cosmic rules, members believe they are on the mission to transcend these values to the Japanese society, not because they are the chosen people (as no divine entity chose them), but because they are the offspring of this utopian society and are the only nation that can possibly revive its settings. Nevertheless, the Katakamuna is just one of the beliefs out of a few that KH holds, which all support and complete one another in their justification for the existence of the community.

The combination of a given religious groups' hybrid teachings is one of the elements that make them unique in the eyes of their members. The familiar Japanese folklore and beliefs taken from existing religions and traditions pave the way to new interpretations of familiar costumes. None of KH's beliefs and practices were first seen in KH, and all of them meet similarities to prior beliefs and practices. The same applies to KH's communal living: (Shimazono, 1996, p. 175-176) identifies three features of NNR, when one of them is to form a commune or distinctive lifestyle which deals with thought and behavior on every aspect of the daily life of the members. Although this feature is not common in all NNR, it is evident in the Unification of World Christianity

and in Aum Shinrikyo. This also applies to the Yamagishi Movement (which has not been defined as a religious group, although some of its practices could be considered religious, see Spiri, 2008). It takes a charismatic leader to unite members around a variation of ideas and a distinctive way of living, a role that Jijji plays successfully. Although some of its concepts might be complex, participating in rituals and adopting beliefs that one does not comprehend completely is common in NRM and NNR (Prohl, 2012). Therefore, having familiar words and terms like kami and karma might bridge between partial understanding and beliefs and practices related to these misunderstood concepts. Narrowing down these ideas to simple slogans such as ‘getting over the ego’, ‘polishing the heart’, and ‘listening to the divine’s will’ help members remember the purpose of their membership and the community’s significance.

KH is a representative of the Japanese society’s margins as a spirituality-based group practicing communal living under one leader. Yet, margins of any given society can shed light on the nature of the greater society it is a part of as it offers solutions to problems some individuals in the society are struggling with. Nonetheless, estimations of Japanese who are members of NRM and NNR are ten per cent of the Japanese population (Inoue, 2009, p. 18). Given the fact that some of the members of such groups would not consider themselves religious in any survey, the number is likely to be higher than ten per cent. Hence, such groups are not a negligible portion of Japan’s population. While KH does not define itself as an ecovillage, nor the GEN, and indeed there is a discord discrepancy when examining the environmental objectives of the community in the face of its environmental practices, an ecovillage is not a term that fits to describe KH. The community also dismisses the definition of a religious group, as it sees itself as a community of individuals seeking to attain personal spiritual growth for the sake of society. Also, KH is not restrictive, impersonal, and institutionalized as religious groups are perceived to be (see Shimazono & Graf, 2012). Therefore, and given that the community presents many of the characteristics of NNR, some are very rare like communal living, KH should be considered as a NNR, despite the era it was established in, which is not in line with older NNR. Finally, one of the hardships in terming KH is the fact that no comparable spiritual groups from the post-bubble economy era were thoroughly researched and defined. Therefore, the utmost efforts should be made to investigate similar groups to gain a better understanding of KH and of the Japanese society’s religious groups that are active and growing in the beginning of the twenty-first century.

XIII. CONCLUSION

Although KH are highly reluctant from the definition “religion”, they shows the same characteristics as various other NNR active in Japan since the 1970s. Their purification rituals, beliefs in divine entities, chanting, praying, and mythological beliefs resonates with many other religions, and their hybrid teachings, the focus on the individual salvation and on *polishing one’s heart* points at their classification as Neo-new religion. It will be beneficial to study more spiritual groups which operates in Japan today to see if such groups share the same qualities as KH, and to gain more knowledge on current religious movements in Japan.

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- [21] Although Jijji was named Isadon at the time of the author's data collection, to aviod confusion he will be called Jijji throughout this paper, including in quotation that originally referred to him as “Isadon”.¹
- [22] In this article, karma indicates what KH members refer to as karma.²
- [23] Name analysis in Japan is not unique to KH, and is known by the name kanji no kakusu ni yoru seimeihanda (To hide the night life solder), judgment the first name and last name by counting the kanji strokes.³
- [24] The story is documented in the community and is often referred to in the community’s website, in meetings, and in daily conversations.⁴
- [25] “The whole land under the sun” is a translation of hinomotono kuni (Country under the sun). First Jijji thought the meaning was “everyone in Japan”, but later he admitted he was wrong in his interpretation, and noted that the meaning was that he should preach to “the whole world”.⁵
- [26] All names in this paper, except of Jijji, are pseudonym.⁶
- [27] “Learning the personality” is a termed KH members often use.⁷
- [28] The community has a book that all the 80 Katakana chants are written in. Each chant has a number.⁸
- [29] When asking Jijji if he would not mind that I will publish this topic in an academic paper, he replied: “You have the freedom to do whatever you want, that's how much we are open. Originally the story about sex - I'm not manipulating information here. You understand that. We are determined to be open publicly because we recognize its importance.” (February 20, 2018).⁹
- [30] Gaia Education is an international organization that promotes sustainable development education programs.¹⁰

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