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Book Author(s): Chika Watanabe

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Chapter 1

A History of the Nonreligious

As one of the oldest Japanese NGOs, OISCA is an ideal diagnostic lens through which to examine the historical configurations behind aid work in Japan. In particular, a surprising history emerges around questions of religion and secularism in postwar Japan, a dynamic that is not often considered in discussions of Japanese development aid and NGOs. In many ways, the case of OISCA seems like an unusual phenomenon. Given that the approaches to aid work in OISCA do not seem to suit any existing categories—the emphasis on a disciplined collective lifestyle, for example—we might view the organization as a misfit, always in the wrong place and at the wrong time. But OISCA is a historically, politically, and culturally specific phenomenon that seems to be exceptional only because it diverges from the standard accounts of aid work, in both Euro-American and Japanese contexts. This is not just a story of how much or how little Japanese approaches differ from preconceived notions. What we find in OISCA exists on the limits of dominant understandings, and this is an opportunity to look at aid work from the specificities of historical, regional, and ethnographic analyses—a perspective that ultimately is not confined to Japanese cases and can be applied to other forms of aid work around the world.

The Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC), a major networking and information center for NGOs in Japan, identifies the first international NGOs in Japan—NGOs working outside Japan—as Christian medical groups that traveled to China in 1938 to provide care to refugees who were forced to flee by the Japanese military invasion (2007). Two decades of inactivity followed due to World War II and its aftermath, but in the late 1950s new aid activities began to emerge. By the 1960s the first NGO-type organizations were established, such as OISCA in 1961, the Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP) in 1968, and the beginnings of the Asian Rural Institute (ARI, or Ajia Gakuin) in 1960. The precursor to the government aid agency JICA

was also established in 1962 (under the name of Overseas Technical Cooperation Agency, or OTCA). In the 1970s the growth of NGOs continued, particularly those with leftist and advocacy orientations. A number of them such as the Association to Aid Refugees (AAR) appeared in response to the large number of refugees from Indochina and Cambodia who arrived in Japan during this period. Throughout the 1980s, development NGOs grew in number, as well as those addressing environmental, human rights, and other issues. The 1990s saw the greatest increase of NGOs, partly due to the impact of wars in the former Yugoslavia and of the Rwandan genocide; these events raised public consciousness of the need for international aid interventions, especially in humanitarian emergencies. The majority of NGOs in Japan today were established during this time (JANIC 2016, 15).

Civil society actors in Japan have ranged from groups of activists to labor unions and institutionalized NGOs. Civic groups overall tended to take an antigovernmental stance in the 1960s, but by the 1990s they saw benefit in cooperating with the state and, conversely, state actors regarded civic actors, including NGOs, as helpful collaborators in the provision of welfare services, international aid, and other activities (Avenell 2010; see also Hirata 2004). In 1989 the government set up a Small-Scale Grant Assistance scheme (now called Grant Assistance of Grassroots Projects), which supported grassroots development and humanitarian projects by local groups and NGOs overseas, and the NGO Subsidy System, which provided grants to Japanese NGOs working overseas. The dominant understanding of Japanese aid systems throughout these eras has been that they are ultimately constrained by the state, whether that is developmental or neoliberal. NGOs have also been seen to exist in a hierarchical structure at the mercy of the government (Reimann 2010; Schwartz and Pharr 2003). Until the 1990s, civic groups had only two ways to register as public interest organizations: as an incorporated association (*shadan hōjin*) or an incorporated foundation (*zaidan hōjin*), as defined by the Japanese Civil Code of 1896.¹ OISCA registered as an incorporated foundation in 1969. This process required the permission of a governmental agency such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which would oversee the organization, and an endowment of at least 3 million yen (about US\$300,000) for associations and 300 million yen (about US\$3 million) for foundations (Reimann 2010, 36–37).² These were difficult requirements to meet for most civic groups in Japan that did not have the capital or political connections.

In 1998 the situation changed. The Law to Promote Specified Non-profit Activities (NPO Law) was passed, the first legal framework for

nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations in Japan. Civic groups, including those that conduct development projects overseas, were now able to register as formal nonprofit entities with tax-exempt status, making it easier for them to collect donations and for government agencies to work with them as legally recognized organizations (Osborne 2003). Nevertheless, nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations have remained relatively small in terms of numbers and finance. As of 2015, there were 50,867 registered nonprofit organizations, 9,581 of which conducted “international cooperation” (*kokusai kyōryoku*) activities ranging from poverty reduction to cultural exchange. Of the registered nonprofits, 955 were “authorized NPOs” (*nintei NPO*) that received tax benefits on donations and averaged seventeen workers per organization, six of whom were permanent paid employees. Of the authorized NPOs, 42.8 percent had revenues between JPY 10 million and 50 million (US\$83,333–\$416,667), while 13 percent had revenues between JPY 50 million and 100 million (US\$416,667–\$833,333) (Cabinet Office 2016, 2017).³ In comparison, the United States had 1.41 million registered nonprofit organizations in 2013, with a total revenue of US\$2.26 trillion (McKeever 2015).

Most of the major NGOs in Japan are registered in JANIC’s directory, totaling approximately 430 organizations as of 2016. According to JANIC’s most recent 2016 survey of the NGOs in its directory (2016, 64), among organizations that work internationally, six of the top ten with the largest donation revenues were Euro-American or United Nations agencies, such as Médecins Sans Frontières with JPY 7 billion (US\$58.3 million) of donation income. Only 53 NGOs had an annual total revenue of more than JPY 100 million (US\$833,333) (JANIC 2016, 58). In comparison, in 2016 in the United States, 100 nonprofits received donations totaling more than US\$45 billion, and of those that work internationally, the Task Force for Global Health had the largest donation revenue, US\$3.2 billion (Barrett 2016).

Some other types of organizations could fit into the category of NGOs in Japan, such as nonprofit organizations registered under the NPO Law or under a different legal category, organizations that work domestically or internationally (or both), and organizations established in other decades. In this book, I follow JANIC’s definition of NGOs in Japan as “organizations that do not seek profit and [that] tackle global problems such as poverty, famine, and the environment from a private citizen’s position that differs from that of governments and international agencies and transcends national, ethnic, and religious borders” (2016, 11). Thus, “NGO” in this view

includes not only organizations registered under the NPO Law but also those registered as incorporated associations and incorporated foundations that do not seek profit, and it is limited to groups that address global problems and have projects overseas. This understanding reflects wider uses of the term “NGO” in Japan, which refers to organizations with international projects, while “NPO” tends to refer to organizations that work only inside Japan. I consider OISCA, registered as an incorporated foundation and working internationally on environmental and agricultural development issues, to be an NGO in this sense.

According to JANIC, most representatives or directors of NGOs are male, but staff members tend to be female (2016, 95, 99). Staffers also tend to be educated, the majority being university graduates and many of the ones from prominent humanitarian and development NGOs having obtained master’s degrees in the UK or the United States (109). Salaries are relatively low. According to JANIC’s 2009 survey, 90 percent of annual salaries in Japanese NGOs were below JPY 5 million (US\$64,000), and most were between JPY 2 million and 3 million (US\$25,974–\$38,961) (2011, 122). In contrast, the median salary in Japan that year was JPY 4.27 million (US\$55,454) (MHLW 2009). Fifty-eight percent of NGO staffers surveyed tended to be mostly in their twenties, thirties, or forties, with only a few over fifty years old (JANIC 2011, 120). From my own experience working in a Japanese humanitarian NGO, staffers are also generally urban and middle class or upper middle class; at the very least, they do not usually come from poor backgrounds.

Although I label OISCA an NGO, it differs from the general trend captured in JANIC’s surveys. Its nongovernmental-ness, historical development, staff members’ backgrounds, and approach to development aid diverge from the characteristics of most NGOs in Japan. For instance, as I mentioned in the introduction, senior Japanese staff members in OISCA typically came from poor, rural backgrounds, with little formal education. At the same time, OISCA captured the attention and support of powerful politicians and state actors, shaping in many ways some of the dominant ideologies of Japanese aid. OISCA is therefore at the limits of both Euro-American understandings of development aid as well as standard accounts of Japanese NGOs, but, as a limit case, it is a productive example through which to understand important currents that pushed forward certain imaginations of development intervention. Understanding OISCA means revising conventional accounts of development aid and NGOs, in the context of both Japan and elsewhere.

A Conference Foretold

My first field experience with OISCA was at the Tokyo headquarters in January 2009. The offices are located in an affluent suburb of the capital and occupy a two-story concrete building that could be seen from the over-ground train. The building was noticeable because of the cute logo at the top of it: a blue swirl with two dots in the middle that looked like a smiley face, supposedly representing a worm that symbolized permaculture and the principles of sustainable agriculture. OISCA owns two headquarters buildings, one with the offices and the other with the canteen where everyone had lunch together and the dormitories where a couple of the young Japanese staff members, the one or two non-Japanese staff, and a couple of the elderly unmarried staffers without families lived at the time of my research.

Both buildings resembled Japanese schools where people had to take off their shoes at the entrance and change into slippers. And it was always too cold or too hot. The departments for the overseas projects, training programs in Japan, and administration were on the ground floor of the office building, and public relations and other administrative personnel occupied the basement. Desks were lined up next to each other, with nothing but staff's binders as *de facto* walls, not an uncommon layout in a Japanese office environment. The secretary-general sat against the window at the front of the office space on the ground floor, from where he could see everyone's activities. Not that he was always there, since he seemed to be constantly running from meeting to meeting. Approximately forty staff members occupied the Tokyo headquarters, half of them senior staffers who were older and from Ananaikyō families, and half junior staff members who were younger and, except for one man and one woman, not Ananaikyō members. There was also one woman from the Philippines who had been a trainee years earlier and had been working in the headquarters for about a year when I met her. A few times a week, one or two Japanese volunteers came to help with various minor jobs such as stuffing envelopes.

January 2009 was a very cold month. As I sat shivering in front of a computer, tackling a translation job that some staffers had given me in my temporary role as a "volunteer," one of the older Japanese staff members rolled his chair over to my desk and tapped me on the shoulder. He asked me, "Do you know about OISCA's founder?" I shook my head.

Shimada-san, a man in his late fifties, knew that I was there as a researcher hoping to study OISCA's training activities in Japan and Myanmar. In the following months, he became one of my most interesting

interlocutors, mainly because he was a talkative man who existed on the peripheries of the organization. He had received a doctoral degree in a social science from a university in the United States and joined OISCA at the suggestion of his father, who was himself involved in OISCA's activities as a supporter and donor. During my time at OISCA, Shimada-san was tasked with managing and sending messages through the OISCA International Listserv, which connected the Tokyo office with the OISCA chapters around the world. He sent daily e-mails to this vast consortium, quoting scholarly texts about environmental crises or statements that OISCA's founder had made decades ago. Nobody seemed to know what his role entailed beyond managing the Listserv, and over time I came to see that he was, in effect, a marginal character in the Tokyo office. But in his marginality, he often offered intriguing perspectives on the organization. On this wintry day, he took it upon himself to initiate me into OISCA's fraught history.

"The founder, Nakano Yonosuke," he told me, "suffered from a severe illness in his forties and wandered for a few days in that space between life and death. During this time, he had a vision and saw OISCA. He was actually an entrepreneur, but after he recovered from his sickness, he quit and founded the new religious group Ananaikyō."

The OISCA website did not mention Ananaikyō or religion, so I was surprised.

"Do all the staff members know this?" I asked.

"Yes, they do. It's just that they don't talk about it."

"Why not?"

Shimada-san looked at me and motioned with his hand so that I would move closer. I shuffled my chair next to him. He bent toward me and I leaned into him, and we found ourselves hidden behind a pile of books. He continued in a whisper.

"I'm not part of Ananaikyō, but there are some people here who are members, like the secretary-general and the deputy. But people tell us that saying religious things sounds too *usankusai* [fishy], so we're told not to mention things like that. For example, in the 1970s, Nakano Yonosuke had a vision that there would be a conference about garbage in the Amazon and told OISCA staff to go there. No one knew what he was talking about then. But it turns out that he was referring to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro!"

A prophetic vision of an international conference. The revelation caught me off guard. But the conversation stayed with me, and I soon realized that it was a window into the organization's complex history of religious beginnings and subsequent claims of being "nonreligious" that have

constituted the foundation of OISCA activities. In this chapter and the next one, I ask: How do we understand the fact that people such as Shimada-san could speak about OISCA's religious legacies only in a whisper? What does it mean that staff members and supporters stressed that OISCA was not religious, and what were the consequences of such assertions? What new interpretations does this specific history give us about the development of Japanese aid systems and organizations? While anthropologists and other scholars have described how religious principles such as charity (Bornstein 2005) or secular framings in medical imperatives (Redfield 2013) inform practices of aid, I am interested in looking at the ambivalence among aid workers about their organization's religious roots as a productive line of inquiry. This perspective requires that we examine the historical and political contexts of saying that one is neither religious nor secular—that is, of asserting that one is what I call nonreligious.

Not Religion (*Shūkyō ja nai*)

Aid actors in OISCA were mostly uncertain and uneasy about the organization's religious background.⁴ Their assertion that OISCA was not religious was linked to the claims of being ultimately about Shinto. One senior staff member explained the legacies of Ananaikyō in OISCA in this manner: "In the case of Shinto, it's part of culture [*bunka*], a part of a spiritual structure, and so it's hard to capture this as 'religion.'" Most people in Japan would accept this explanation, for the notion that Shinto is "Japanese culture" has an established history in Japan. Shinto has no doctrines or regular practices to follow, and the only exposure to so-called Shinto practices for most Japanese citizens are during New Year's visits to shrines, summer festivals, and rites of passage for children at ages three, five, and seven. Some people do not even go to these events. The majority of people would describe these practices as cultural customs and not religion. Furthermore, most citizens do not identify as being religious, and religious institutions (Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines) and individual practices such as pilgrimages are declining on the whole. According to a 1952 survey conducted by a national newspaper, 64.7 percent of respondents claimed to have a religious belief; in 2005 the figure was at 22.9 percent (Reader 2012, 12). A similarly low percentage of respondents thought that religion was important for society. Avoiding religion is not uncommon in Japan.

Instead of evaluating the statement that OISCA is not religious as hiding some "true" religious orientation, I am interested in how these arguments of being not religious facilitated certain politics, relationships, and

imaginaries of a better future. In order to understand why OISCA staff members and supporters might have opted to translate the organization's religious legacies into something else, the controversial history of new religions in Japan becomes relevant. For readers knowledgeable about Japan, this story will be familiar. For others, this is an important backdrop for understanding why people in Japan might often speak of something as being "not religion." Scholars have examined how "religion" (*shūkyō*) appeared as a sociologically and politically significant category in late nineteenth-century Japan in relation to questions of modernity, secularity, and superstition, for example, as Japan opened its gates to Europe and the United States (e.g., Isomae 2006; Josephson 2012; Shimazono and Tsuruoka 2004). While "religion" appeared in conjunction with secularity as a modern and rational category, "new religions" founded around the turn of the twentieth century came to be vilified by state authorities and the media as irrational and subversive, in need of control in the name of a modern Japan. Groups such as Ōmoto, founded in 1892, promoted mystical spiritual practices and messages of societal and world reform that were inspired by ideas of Shinto and proved widely popular. The movement was particularly threatening to a Japanese government that was attempting to centralize citizens' loyalty to the nation-state through orthodox forms of state-organized Shinto (Garon 1997; Stalker 2008). Ōmoto became the target of violent government suppression in the 1920s and 1930s, during a turbulent time when Yonosuke was a member. Laws between the 1920s and 1940s also aimed to control religious groups that were deemed to diverge from state-sanctioned teachings. The media also played a significant role in vilifying new religions as irrational or superstitious, in contrast to "genuine religions" such as orthodox Buddhist sects that have existed since before the eighteenth century, a tendency that did not wane after World War II (Dorman 2012).

In fact, the negative portrayal of new religions picked up renewed momentum after the war. The US occupying forces ensured the separation of religion and the state in Japan's postwar constitution in an effort to abolish the wartime government's use of Shinto as the basis for its moral authority. This policy defined State Shinto as a religion that needed to be eradicated from the state (Hardacre 1989; Shimazono 2010). Much of the discussion of Shinto today carries the shadows of this idea of associating State Shinto with imperialist Japan. Chapter 2 deals more closely with the question of Shinto, religion, and the secular. For the purposes of this chapter, what is relevant is that the conflicts and anxieties over the role of

religion in the public sphere became a major topic of debate in the wake of World War II in Japan.

In particular, one of the largest Buddhist-based new religions, Sōka Gakkai, and its expansion into formal electoral politics caused the media, orthodox religions, politicians, and other public voices to raise alarm at the irrational forces of new religions that threatened a democratic and secular postwar Japan (McLaughlin 2012). Orthodox Shinto groups such as those that formed the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honchō) in 1946 were especially keen to recover the image of Shinto out of the specter of State Shinto. They attacked new religions in order to distance themselves from any religions that the media and public might deem superstitious and malicious and that had advanced into public and political realms in ways that seemed to contradict the tenets of secularism (Dorman 2012, 206).⁵ But no other event has had as great a negative impact on new religions as the Aum sarin gas attacks of 1995 (Baffelli and Reader 2012; Hardacre 2003). Followers of Aum Shinrikyō released deadly gas in the Tokyo subways, killing thirteen people and injuring nearly six thousand more. Since then, new religions have been the subject of intense public suspicion, state suppression, and legal surveillance.

In light of this context, it is no surprise that OISCA staffers tried to distance themselves from the organization's roots in a new religion. After all, Ananaikyō, and OISCA by association, had been the target of media attacks as well. In addition to OISCA, Yonosuke established a school in 1968 that later became the OISCA high school and the OISCA vocational college (*senmon gakkō*). In July 1990 the weekly tabloid magazine *Shūkan bunshun*, published an exposé that claimed to reveal the neoimperialist and right-wing orientations of Ananaikyō and the OISCA high school (*Shūkan bunshun* 1990). The article described how teachers in the high school taught militaristic forms of physical and spiritual discipline to the students, as well as allegiance to the emperor. The walls of the school were adorned with slogans from wartime Japan such as *hakkō ichiu*—a slogan meaning “the eight corners of the world under the one heaven of benevolent imperial rule,” which was used to support Japanese imperialism in World War II (see also Hayashi M. 1987). In some ways, these media portrayals are not wrong, since Yonosuke and his followers have had right-wing affiliations and political positions. Yet we also need to place these public outcries in the context of a widespread vilification of new religions in Japan. Given this background, OISCA staffers' resistance to being affiliated with a new religion makes sense.

Staffers' claims that OISCA is not a religious organization might seem to suggest a secular view. Since Max Weber's pronouncement of the "disenchantment of the world," scholars on the whole adhered to secularization theories, in which they saw modernity to necessitate the decline and privatization of religion (e.g., Berger [1967] 1990). Most studies of new religions and State Shinto in Japan mentioned above have been based on this framework. But in the 1990s, influential thinkers—some of whom had previously espoused secularization theories—began to question this assumption, pointing to the (re)emergence of religions in modern public realms (Berger 1999; Casanova 1994; Habermas 2008). No longer certain that the secular in modern life included the erasure of religion from the public sphere, people began to rethink the relationship between the two categories. Talal Asad's seminal work of 2003 argued that the secular did not appear after and in opposition to religion and that, rather, the two have always coexisted in the making of modern (Western) society (see also Calhoun et al. 2011; Dressler and Mandair 2011; C. Taylor 2007).⁶ In short, the disenchantment of the modern world did not erase religion; instead, it shaped religion as a distinct category and transformed it as part of the epistemological and political project of modernity. Thus, religion and the secular are mutually constitutive elements of the modern.

It is important to note that when OISCA's staffers and supporters distanced themselves from Ananaiyō, they did not then embrace a secular position of science and rationality. Religion and secularism are not in opposition, and the rejection of one does not lead to an acceptance of the other. OISCA's senior staffers spoke of miraculous happenings around the weather and of supernatural relationships between human and nonhuman worlds. The nonreligious claims that I identify sought to sidestep the category of the secular as well as religion (see chapter 2).

The argument about the nonreligious that I describe in the following pages has three steps, which are the topics of this chapter. First, I explain how Yonosuke's role as the leader of a new religion shaped the vision and activities in the development of OISCA. Second, I examine how, despite this history, Japanese staff members today diverged in their views regarding OISCA's religious legacies, largely along generational lines. But this generational schism meant that younger staff members were largely unaware of the deep political ties through Yonosuke that had led to OISCA's success. In the third section, then, I give a detailed history of Yonosuke's relationships with politicians as a lens that brings into focus why the rise of international aid systems in Japan cannot be divorced from the history of new religions and politics. Ultimately, I suggest that generational tensions

are productive foci of analysis because they offer a window into the unexamined history of religion and politics in Japanese aid, and they show how the struggles to contend with the past and chart the future constitute important dynamics in the moral imagination of aid work. In chapter 2, I concentrate on the main part of the argument, which shows how OISCA staff members and supporters framed the nonreligious in terms of what I call “Shinto” environmentalism. The logic of the nonreligious in this analysis demonstrates how aid actors used ideas of “Japaneseness” to make universal environmentalist claims. This conceptual move forms the foundation of the analyses in subsequent chapters.

The International Spiritual Congresses

In order to grasp the arguments of the nonreligious, an understanding of Yonosuke’s activities before his establishment of OISCA is necessary. Yonosuke was born in 1887 in Shizuoka Prefecture. In the 1920s he joined Ōmoto, one of the largest new religions at the time. He had been impressed with Deguchi Onisaburō, the effective leader of Ōmoto, and with Onisaburō’s fight against government suppression when he read about events in the news. For whatever reason, Yonosuke found the Ōmoto movement appealing. According to an Ananaikyō representative’s recounting of events to me, at the age of forty, Yonosuke had his first significant prophetic vision, in which he saw a godly presence tell him: “You have been successful for forty years in the human world; for the latter half of your life, you should commit yourself to serving the world.” Leaving his profession and wealth as a businessman in the construction business, Yonosuke became a full-time Ōmoto follower. Yonosuke’s time in Ōmoto had a significant influence in how he envisioned OISCA’s mission in later years. The Ananaikyō representative told me that Yonosuke became the target of state suppression alongside other Ōmoto followers, spending some time in jail in the 1930s. In 1949 he established Ananaikyō as a registered religious organization (*shūkyō hōjin*).⁷

I heard this official Ananaikyō history from a representative who was tasked with introducing me to the religious group during my visit to its headquarters in Shizuoka in the early spring of 2010. When I expressed interest in learning more about Ananaikyō, the secretary-general of OISCA had suggested that I participate in a two-day induction course in Shizuoka. I had to pay a fee of JPY 20,000 (US\$220), but for the price I was able to stay overnight at the headquarters and receive a one-on-one seminar about the history and teachings behind Ananaikyō. The representative, Nagano-san,

spent hours talking to me about Yonosuke and his philosophy. He told me that after Yonosuke established Ananaikyō as an official religious organization, people came from all over Japan to join the movement. In subsequent years, regional temples and branches were set up across the country. But as of the mid-1990s, Ananaikyō had only twenty-four thousand members, making it substantially smaller than the major new religions of the time (Inoue et al. 1996, 9). Nagano-san told me that the number of active members today is probably about three thousand.

Yonosuke's vision went beyond purely religious activities, however. Throughout the 1950s he and his followers constructed astronomical observatories with the advice and support of prominent astronomer Yamamoto Issei from Kyoto University. According to Nagano-san, Yonosuke visited Yamamoto without warning to offer his views on religion as "the teaching that points people toward the universe." He illustrated this point by unpacking the kanji (Chinese-based) characters for religion (*shūkyō* 宗教): *shū* 宗 being deconstructed to "universe" (*uchū* 宇宙, from the radical *u-kanmuri* at the top) and "to point" (*shimesu* 示), and *kyō* 教, meaning "teaching." Despite the unsolicited visit, Yamamoto was apparently taken by Yonosuke's words. They shared the view that the universe has a *kokoro* (heart or mind) that cannot be explained by science. Subsequently, with the help of Yamamoto, Yonosuke and Ananaikyō members constructed observatories at various places in Japan until they were widespread, to the point that this accomplishment even became the subject of a novel by a well-known author (Satō A. 1975). Today only one is left, the Gekkō Observatory in Shizuoka Prefecture. In 1968, Yonosuke established the Astronomy and Geology Technical School (Tenmon Chigaku Senmon Gakkō) and he later restructured it into two schools: the OISCA high school and the OISCA College for Global Cooperation, the latter of which features a two-year vocational program for high school graduates interested in working in international aid, especially with OISCA. Approximately a quarter of the Japanese staff members that I met, mainly from Ananaikyō families but not exclusively, were graduates of either the high school or the college, or both.

The seeds for the establishment of OISCA were sown in the 1950s, when Yonosuke organized international conferences with religious leaders from other countries in an effort to create a new religious coalition for world peace. These events brought together hundreds of religious leaders from Asia, Africa, Europe, and the United States. Yonosuke was not the only one who envisioned a global peace movement around religions at this time. A comparison with other religious peace events might illustrate how Yonosuke, Ananaikyō, and subsequently OISCA have been politically

positioned in Japan. Like Yonosuke, a number of other Japanese religious leaders held international religious peace conferences in the first decade after World War II. These efforts culminated in the World Conference on Religions for Peace, organized in Kyoto in 1961 and attended by 47 religious leaders from around the world and 226 religious leaders from Japan. Sharing a vision of personal and global peace, the participants called for an international movement against nuclear and hydrogen bombs and, in Japan, against the mobilization of religious groups behind the 1960 revision of the Japan-US Security Treaty.⁸ As a result of the conference, in 1962 the Japan Religions Peace Committee (Nihon Shūkyōsha Heiwa Kyōgikai) was established around issues such as the separation of religion and state and, hence, opposition to politicians' visits to the Yasukuni Shrine;⁹ the removal of US military bases from Okinawa; and the promotion of human rights and democracy. Most notably, the committee's declaration of its establishment began with a regret and an apology for having colluded with Japan's military aggression into Asia during World War II. Its principles of world peace came to be based on this political stance (Nihon Shūkyōsha Heiwa Kyōgikai 1968, 194). In contrast, Yonosuke's conferences did not mention Japan's military past, much less an apology to other nations, nor did they advocate for a separation of religion and state. It is evident that Yonosuke's position differed from that of many other religious groups attempting to create a global peace movement at the time.

Instead, Yonosuke's conferences quickly moved away from the framework of "religion" and shifted to include actors other than religious leaders. At these events, Yonosuke proposed the concept of the Great Spirit of the Universe. Yonosuke saw the world united through a connection to this Great Spirit, an energy that runs through nature and the universe and thereby through all life-forms, including humans. This Great Spirit is what enables our existence and is the key to an environmentally sustainable and peaceful future. In 1961, Yonosuke invited more than four hundred people from around the world to participate in the first Congress for Cultivating Universal Human Spirit, organized by himself and cosponsored by the leading religious journal in Kyoto, *Chūgai nippō*. I never found out how Yonosuke was able to assemble this many people, but the goals of this event were clear: to realize a utopian vision wherein humans "return to nature," living by the laws of the Great Spirit of the Universe and moving away from the destructive future of science and modernization (OISCA 1961, 13). A second congress was held in the same year, and the attendees formed the precursor to OISCA, the International Organization for Cultivating Human Spirit (IOCHS).

In subsequent meetings, Yonosuke, having received requests for aid from Asian leaders who were battling food scarcity in their countries, proposed that the organization should focus on agricultural aid in Asia, specifically through agricultural training programs. The focus on agriculture reflected Yonosuke's views that agriculture, fisheries, and forestry were the industries most faithful to the Great Spirit of the Universe (Nakano Yonosuke 1967, 2). Moreover, it connected to his belief in astronomy. As he explained, "Agriculture has always been closely associated with the activities of the Heavenly bodies. . . . By taking full advantage of the knowledge of the heavenly movements and the meteorological conditions, agriculture can produce the richest dividends" (9; orig. English). Although OISCA staffers' approach to agriculture did not completely adhere to organic methods from the beginning, Yonosuke preached against the use of chemicals. As early as 1967, he stated:

While it is possible for chemical fertilizers to enrich the soil, it has also been pointed out that rice which relies excessively on chemical fertilizers is not without some harmful effects to health. It is for these reasons that agriculture which relies on natural growth and is not dependent on chemical insecticides follows the great teachings of the Universe and Nature. . . . Thus, agricultural work should be undertaken in observance of the natural laws of heaven and earth which no human knowledge can ever faithfully fathom (11; orig. English).

Yonosuke's belief was that agricultural aid had to be not simply about the transmission of technical skills but also, and more importantly, about cultivating an attunement with the natural world. For Yonosuke, agricultural labor was a spiritual and transformative endeavor as much as it was a method of food production.

A Movement or Project-based Activities?

OISCA's first staffers set up the headquarters in Tokyo, but the organization quickly spread through affiliates across Japan with the help of Ananaikyō followers. The first staff members were unpaid volunteers, most of whom were Ananaikyō members who equated their work in OISCA with a religious commitment. They joined OISCA as part of their devotion to Yonosuke and to Ananaikyō's visions of a better world, and they committed themselves fully to agricultural aid work without an expectation of remuneration, social benefits, or holidays. A middle-aged staff member who was

not from an Ananaikyō family told me that when he joined OISCA after university in the 1980s, older staffers told him, “We don’t need university graduates!” (*Daigakude wa iranai!*). This was a criticism aimed at what the original staff members—coming from rural, poor backgrounds—perceived as the overanalytical approaches of educated and urban Japanese who thrived in the rapid modernization of postwar Japan but did not understand the values of practice-based and hands-on approaches to agricultural labor and trainings.

From my life history interviews with staff members, it appears that the first staff members in OISCA came largely from poor backgrounds or after hardships trying to make it in an increasingly competitive society. This demographic makeup makes sense, given that new religions in Japan since the nineteenth century have tended to attract rural and poor populations, as reflected also in Yonosuke’s followers. Although data are insufficient to conclude that Ananaikyō provided a strong network and political voice for marginalized and poor citizens in 1960s Japan as the major new religion Sōka Gakkai did (McLaughlin 2014, 77), the characteristics of the early (and thus senior) OISCA staff members suggest this trend. Joining OISCA was more than a job for these first staffers; it was a way for people who felt left behind in industrial and Tokyo-centric Japan to find a meaningful vocation and a place to belong. Although since the 1980s an increasing proportion of staff members had been non-Ananaikyō, urban, educated, and young, the organization’s roots in rural and poor populations is important in how aid work has been understood in OISCA and even in wider Japanese aid discourses.

From the 1980s onward, the number of active members in Ananaikyō fell to a couple of thousand, and it became increasingly difficult to keep the third- and fourth-generation children of Ananaikyō families interested in Ananaikyō activities, much less recruit new young members (Sagami 2014).¹⁰ Moreover, as international aid work became more popular in Japan and the sources of funding diversified with the rise of governmental schemes for NGOs and corporate social responsibility programs in the private sector, OISCA had to begin opening its doors to non-Ananaikyō workers. Today an unspoken divide exists between Ananaikyō and non-Ananaikyō staffers, generally coinciding with generational differences between those in their sixties or older and those in their late twenties and thirties. This is a distinction in which the former are the senior management staff and directors of training centers, positions that the latter can almost never achieve.¹¹ As with many other NGOs in Japan, the retention rate of mid-level staff in their forties and fifties, especially those with families, was

low due to humble wages and frequent overseas postings (JANIC 2011, 120–121). The wide generational gap created disparities in staff members' views on what aid work should look like.

One senior staff member, Ueda-san, described this difference in terms of the perception of OISCA as a movement-based entity (*undōtai*) or as a project-based entity (*jigyōtai*). He used these expressions to explain his theory and criticism of organizational change, but this description also mapped onto the shifts and tensions across the generational and Ananaikyō/non-Ananaikyō divides. Although another senior staffer to whom I mentioned Ueda-san's view disliked this simplistic characterization, I found the heuristic helpful because it captured how the older Ananaikyō staffers tended to see their work as a lifelong commitment to global change, while the younger non-Ananaikyō aid workers generally understood their work within the frameworks of temporally distinct and bureaucratically managed projects. Despite the authority of senior staff members, OISCA's projects were now generally managed as in other NGOs: through budgets and project reports. Work in the Tokyo office revolved around bureaucratic tasks informed by activities organized around projects as units of management.

For Ueda-san, the transformation of the organization from a movement-based to a project-based structure had been detrimental to the main purpose of the work envisioned by Yonosuke. In Ueda-san's eyes, the concern over budgets, project management procedures, and the needs of corporate and governmental donors seemed to detract from the original aim of world renewal and global peace. This was a different era from the first decades when OISCA projects depended almost entirely on individual membership fees and private donations that allowed staffers to direct and implement projects in whatever ways they deemed fit. "Our mission was supposed to be about spreading our vision as a movement, but these days it is all about projects!" he complained.

OISCA as a movement-based entity demanded from participants a commitment to the work that should go above and beyond the needs of a job description, captured in what senior staffers called *hōshi*. I translate *hōshi* as "voluntarism," but it contains a sense of "serving" something of a higher order, rather than charity (cf. Georgeou 2010). In the realm of international aid, we see the term surface at the turn of the twentieth century among aid actors of the Japanese Red Cross Society, who explained their humanitarian work as *hōshi* to the emperor (Kurosawa and Kawai 2009). A young Ananaikyō staff member in OISCA explained to me that, in Ananaikyō, *hōshi* refers to a dedication to the religious group, shown by living at the headquarters in Shizuoka or at other temples around the country. Working

in OISCA formed part of this principle of *hōshi* in Ananaikyō. Accordingly, until the mid-1980s, staff members did not receive a salary, because their work constituted an act of *hōshi*. Senior staff members told me that many people in the first teams who went to India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and other countries in the 1960s and 1970s sold almost everything they had in order to pay for plane tickets and basic living expenses overseas, often leaving their wives and children to survive on their own in Japan. One man in his late seventies told me that his family eventually lost their farm after he left for India in 1965, and his wife struggled to raise their children without him. But even though there was no pay, staffers did not have to worry about food or lodging because the training centers became their home as well as their workplace. Work merged with life itself. Even today there are Ananaikyō women who cook lunch at the Tokyo office canteen as a form of *hōshi*, and most of the other young staffers who do not live in the dorms live together in OISCA-owned apartments a short train ride away.

The younger non-Ananaikyō staff members in the Tokyo office generally resisted this definition of aid work in terms of the full-time commitments of *hōshi*. I was told that, over the years, the new, young staffers had demanded more life-work balance—for instance, by reducing the number of weekends that staff members had to come into the office. In 2004 an external consultant team conducted a survey among current and former staffers titled “Project to Rediscover OISCA’s Appeal” (OISCA miryoku saihakken purojekuto), which reflected many of the contrasting views between older and younger staff members. Younger staffers commented that OISCA needed to make changes to strengthen a “consciousness of professionalism” (*puro ishiki*) and thereby reform the financial, membership, and administrative management systems; to improve the current labor conditions and benefits package; and to unify staffers’ consciousness in order to solve the existing problems in the organization (OISCA 2004, 7). In the report, young staff members seemed to generally agree that the strong “volunteer consciousness” (*borantia ishiki*) stemming from the values of *hōshi* had led to a weak management system. This also related to their complaints about extremely low salaries, even by NGO standards in Japan, and the uncertainties that came with the nonstandardization of pay structures. Another complaint was the deep divide between older and younger generations and between Ananaikyō and non-Ananaikyō members. One young staff member stated in the report:

OISCA is a vertical society [*tateshakai*; i.e., hierarchical society] like in a Japanese corporation. Also like an established corporation, it is a static

organization. The values between young people and older people are different. Young people today want to be convinced about the reasons for a task before taking on the work. But OISCA in the old days had big bosses who would tell others to do things without questioning anything. I think this was also based on the general sense at the time that it is not manly to be argumentative and fussy. The generation that has come through that era is mostly made up of Ananaikyō members and OISCA-only experts [rather than aid workers with diverse experiences]. In contrast, younger generations are not senior officers or Ananaikyō members, and their values differ from those of older people.

Other young staff members quoted in the report also pointed out that although they could see the positive values of Ananaikyō visions of a better world and respected Nakano Yoshiko (Yonosuke's successor) as a leader, the organizational structure based on the religious group was untenable. They wished to know more about OISCA's religious roots and mission, a topic that they felt the older staff members avoided. Non-Ananaikyō staffers could vaguely understand the value of the spirit of *hōshi*, but they interpreted it as a religious mission, in which they felt they could not participate. "I left because I realized that this was not a workplace for people who have nothing to do with religion," one former staffer explained (OISCA 2004, 10).

In the report's section on the views of senior management staff—that is, older Ananaikyō staffers—interviewees talked about the resistance that they saw from younger staff members about the organization's religious background. The statements above from young staffers who wanted to know more about OISCA's history suggest that this was not entirely true. Nevertheless, senior staffers said:

OISCA's founder was a religious leader, and in the first years he used to do a monthly briefing for all staffers and members. At the time, I also did not understand everything that he said; it is only now that I get it. People in the past clearly understood the founder's vision behind the organization. But young people today seem to dislike that.

Another senior staff member stated that OISCA's philosophy begins from a worldview in which the universe and humans are one, but when he made such assertions, young people complained that it sounded like religion. "I do not think that it is religion or anything like that, but young people these days get caught up in preconceived notions when we use words like 'universe,'" he argued. Several older staff members quoted in the report

agreed with younger staffers that they needed to update the management systems and employment benefits for staff, but there was a general criticism of young people's distaste of the NGO's religious origins.

Given some of the statements by young staffers in the report, the generational conflict might have been an issue of misunderstanding or lack of information, not solely disagreement or even resistance to religion. But I did see pressures for reform during my time at the Tokyo headquarters, indicating that generational frictions and demands for change were present. For instance, JICA officials had been asking OISCA to change the style of its training programs in Japan for several years, mainly the strict lifestyle and heavy load of physical labor. When I interviewed a JICA official who managed activities with OISCA, he told me that the style of trainings in OISCA was difficult to measure because staffers preferred a leading-by-example approach (*sossen suihan*), not always verbalizing the content or method of their training activities (C. Watanabe 2017b). In the survey report, both young and older staff members had voiced a similar characterization of OISCA's trainings: that senior staffers in the training centers tended to be experts of practice-based agricultural knowledge but not always good at explaining things to other people. And so staff members in Tokyo had become accustomed to leaving decisions about projects to the discretion of the directors of the training centers, who had deep knowledge of agriculture, training, and local contexts but did not always articulate their work with words. The JICA official knew this about OISCA and explained: "This makes it difficult to fit OISCA's activities into the logical designs of a JICA project, which is usually constructed around objectives, bases of measurement, and results that can be assessed against these goals." His predecessors had told him that OISCA's projects had to be favored because of certain political connections, but the need for activities to meet the logic of project management systems made it increasingly difficult for the JICA official to accept OISCA's current training style.

In addition to pressure from JICA, OISCA staffers in Tokyo at the time of my research were also trying to adjust the organizational structure to fit new changes in legal registration. Article 34 of the 1896 Civil Code had governed the registration of public interest corporations for more than a century in Japan, with the exception of some amendments by the US Occupation immediately after World War II.¹² Public and state-level discussions to change the law began in the year 2000, two years after the NPO Law went into effect and after several scandals surfaced involving incorporated foundations (*zaidan hōjin*) that were misusing funds. In 2008 the new laws for public interest corporations were established. OISCA, registered as an

incorporated foundation in 1969, had to register anew as a public interest incorporated foundation (*kōeki zaidan hōjin*) and accordingly begin to change its organizational and administrative system in the year 2009.

The details of these legal changes are beyond the scope of my analysis, but it suffices to say that the reforms were forcing OISCA's senior managers to make fundamental changes to the organizational culture. For example, a staff member explained in an internal memo to colleagues that the new laws would affect accounting procedures. Before, the seasoned directors of training centers tended to strategize so that they would have remaining funds at the end of each fiscal year, which they used for other purposes as they deemed fit. The new laws now required all projects to have a balanced budget—that is, to ensure that income and expenditure would be equal, since a public interest group should not in principle generate profit. The memo explained that given both the organizational culture of frugality and the unpredictable situations of local project sites, this could be a difficult change to implement (OISCA Overseas Division 2009).

The senior staff member's description of the conflict between OISCA as a movement-based entity and a project-based entity captured the discrepancies among different generations of staff and between Ananaikyō and non-Ananaikyō staffers, as well as the external pressures to which all staff members had to respond. Despite these differences, I refer to everyone who worked in OISCA full-time as staff (*shokuin*) because that is how they described themselves, regardless of pay or motivation. In this sense, everyone who worked full-time could represent OISCA to outsiders from the position of a staff member. I use the term “volunteer” to refer to those who worked for OISCA without pay and on a part-time or temporary basis, which is how they positioned me in their everyday activities.

Making Persons (*Hitozukuri*)

The generational rifts notwithstanding, one thing generally united OISCA staffers: their commitment to the work of making persons (*hitozukuri*). In international aid discourses, the term *hitozukuri* appeared in 1979, when former prime minister Ōhira Masayoshi gave a speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (Ōhira 1979). He noted that Japan had historically emphasized the value of education, making the development of human resources (*jinteki shigen*) central to the development of the country. He referred to this work as *hitozukuri* and stated that one of the most important tasks in Japanese international aid rested on the nurturing of the “unlimited

potential of young people” around the world through technical trainings based on Japan’s recent experiences of modernization. He elaborated that *hitozukuri* would be not only dedicated to the transfer of technical skills but also conducted through the fostering of mutual understanding within an interdependent (*sōgo izon*) global community.

The approaches to *hitozukuri* in OISCA both reflect and depart from wider Japanese approaches to *hitozukuri* aid (OISCA 2002). The emphasis on human resource development is widespread in Japanese governmental approaches to development aid (Kato 2016). Within this, JICA is the exemplary governmental agency that has used the concept of *hitozukuri* as its conceptual anchor. In 1999, JICA published a report outlining the ideas behind *hitozukuri*, surveying how international ideas of human resource development and Japanese approaches to *hitozukuri* have evolved in line with historical changes since World War II. The report does not quite push the definition further than the idea that the training of persons is key to a country’s economic, social, and institutional development, but it proposes that “human capital” and “capacity building” may be possible English translations of *hitozukuri* (JICA 1999).¹³ Nevertheless, although in some circles *hitozukuri* might look like these neoliberal traditions of “human capital,” I would contend that, contrary to the JICA report, *hitozukuri* as it unfolded in aid projects differs from such ideas, at least until the 2000s (cf. Douglas-Jones and Shaffner 2017). Scholars have understood human capital as the neoliberal ability of individuals to become self-entrepreneurs through an investment in one’s own training or education so as to produce one’s own future income and well-being (Dean [1999] 2010; Feher 2009; Foucault [1979] 2008). In contrast, at its most fundamental level, *hitozukuri* in Japanese aid activities has not been based on the framework of the neoliberal individual, a *homo economicus* “abilities-machine” (Foucault [1979] 2008). Rather, as JICA officials explain, *hitozukuri* has historically been defined as “a concept unique to Japan,” advancing activities that foster “mutual understanding” and take place “in a situation where culture, history, and values are different from those of Japan” (Kanda and Kuwajima 2006, 38). Differing from the self-enterprising neoliberal individual of human capital theories, the concept of *hitozukuri* has been about mutually constituted persons as much as it has been about skills enhancement.

Observers have pointed out that Japanese experts in capacity-building projects tend to understand their work as one of sharing knowledge as well as attitudes—attitudes that “are frequently illustrated by the fact that the Japanese experts are actually to be found in the paddy field or on the project site itself” (King and McGrath 2004, 169). This is not an approach

to training that happens with the expert-teacher standing aside while the trainee toils away; it is a process that demands both trainees and teachers to get their hands dirty together. Thus, *hitozukuri* activities differ from neoliberal forms of technical trainings and sustainable development initiatives (cf. Welker 2012). *Hitozukuri* points to a different world in the making and to different pasts. If anything, it resonates with traditions of “creating a new person” as a form of development intervention that come before the current development regime—that is, traditions of Christian missionaries (Cooper and Packard 2005, 132). I return to this point in chapter 4.

JICA itself has changed its philosophy from *hitozukuri* to “capacity development” to reflect global trends in international discourses (JICA 2008). But the concepts of *hitozukuri* as based on mutuality and working in paddy fields together continued to live on in the imaginations and practices of aid work in OISCA. This characteristic of “making persons” will become clearer in the ethnographic chapters that follow. One aspect worth mentioning here is that OISCA’s Japanese staff members emphasized values such as discipline and communal labor in their training programs, differing from mainstream forms of human resource development (*jinzai ikusei*) and the transfer of technical skills (*gijutsu iten*) in Japan. The training programs in OISCA are carried out at designated training centers over the span of a year, with an emphasis on communal living and collective labor, instead of the trainings that happen in a few days or weeks at places like JICA.

OISCA’s website states that, in addition to imparting technical skills in organic and sustainable farming, the training programs cultivate people’s mind and spirit around values of mutual respect, cooperation, cultural diversity, and harmony with nature through a communal lifestyle.¹⁴ The staff members in the training programs sought to inculcate these values in trainees as manifestations of what Yonosuke termed the “spirit of Japan” (*nihon no seishin*) (Nakano Yonosuke 1970, 8). In many ways, staffers believed that spiritual cultivation (*seishin ikusei*) was more important in bringing about a transformed world than the technical aspects of the trainings. Teaching people to wake up at dawn to participate in shared cleaning duties and to put the interests of the group ahead of one’s own, for instance, was more important than imparting state-of-the-art techniques. Although *seishin ikusei* is translated as *spiritual* cultivation here, it refers not so much to a religious or supernatural process as to the development of personal character and fortitude through discipline and hardship, an approach to learning seen in a wide range of institutions in Japan (Befu 1980; Cave 2004; Dore 1958; Frager and Rohlen 1976; Moeran 1984). In religious and other settings of ethical learning, people also often speak of *shugyō*, a term

that refers to disciplinary practices such as asceticism and meditation, as well as martial arts (Davis 1980; Kondo 1990; Reader 1991; Reader and Tanabe 1998; Schattschneider 2003). These notions of spiritual cultivation are usually tied to essentialized notions of Japanese cultural and moral values, such as perseverance, that are seen to benefit the development of the person. Thus, the emphasis on spiritual cultivation in OISCA is not in itself rare in Japan. Nevertheless, it is not a characteristic of activities in other Japanese NGOs, where skills in project management are valued more than the ability to live a disciplined lifestyle. And yet, in its exceptionality, OISCA managed to capture the imagination of many powerful political actors in postwar Japan.

The Prominence of OISCA

When OISCA began its training programs in the early 1960s, the Japanese government had just begun similar initiatives. OISCA appeared on the scene, not simply when there were few other NGOs in Japan, but when the Japanese government's own aid system was still in its infancy. In 1954, Japan signed the Japan-Burma Peace Treaty and Agreement on Reparations and Economic Cooperation, which was the beginning of the government's financial aid in the form of war reparations to countries in Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific (MOFA 2015). Guided by the US government's plans to make Japan the economic superpower and purveyor of US influence in the region, Japan's state policies targeted Southeast and South Asia, in particular, as markets for Japanese goods and sources of raw materials. This policy enabled former wartime officials and others who had close personal ties with politicians in the region from before World War II to act as trading company executives and brokers (Shiraishi 1997). In 1958, economic cooperation through loans began in India, unrelated to the issue of war reparations, and this model helped expand Japan's trade interests. In 1961, Japan joined the OECD-DAC alongside the other founding countries of Europe and North America, becoming part of the group of "traditional" donors (see introduction). The precursor to JICA was established in 1962, and the Japanese version of the Peace Corps, the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV), began in 1965.

With the input of the US Occupation forces (1945–1952) that wanted to build a strong capitalist (and democratic) Japan, the economic benefits of financing the Korean War (1950–1953), and other domestic factors, the Japanese economy grew exponentially in the decades following World War II (McCargo 2012). By the 1980s it was one of the most powerful industrial

economies in the world. As the economy grew, so did politicians' interests in contributing to international aid. In 1969 the OECD developed the term "Official Development Assistance" (ODA) to measure governmental aid flows to developing countries and stipulated in 1970 that donor countries should aim to achieve a target of 0.7 percent of their gross national product for ODA over a number of years (OECD 2017). In the 1970s, politicians and bureaucrats in Japan showed increasing concern over the country's low level of ODA contribution relative to the levels from other developed countries.¹⁵ Japan completed the payment of war reparations to Asian countries in 1976, and in 1978 the government announced a plan to double its ODA of US\$1.42 billion within three years (MOFA 2015). During this time, DAC countries and UN agencies were shifting their approaches to development aid from national economic growth to focusing on alleviating poverty, meeting people's basic needs, and collaborating with new actors such as NGOs (ODI 1978). Soon NGOs in particular were seen as the solution to the problems and shortcomings of top-down, macro-scale approaches (Fisher 1997).

Japanese state and aid actors were also influenced by these international trends (Leheny and Warren 2010, 7–8). In the midst of discussions about foreign aid policies in Diet (parliamentary) committee meetings, OISCA often came up as an example of an NGO that the Japanese government should encourage in its efforts to "catch up" to the West in terms of financial and other commitments to international aid. As early as 1975, OISCA had been recognized as an international NGO with Category I consultative status with the United Nations, one of only a handful of Japanese organizations to receive this status.¹⁶ In a December 1978 hearing at the Committee on Audit of the House of Councillors, representative Sanji Shigenobu of the Democratic Socialist Party, which at the time was politically allied with the ruling conservative Liberal Democratic Party, made the following statement:

If I can give two or three examples, there are OISCA's activities in Mindanao, in the Philippines, in which they increased rice production together with the local people. Then in two or three years, they gained an incredible amount of trust from the local chiefs and people. So instead of building a center for agricultural experiments, I think that it would be more helpful for increasing the production of rice if we just had three or four young [Japanese] people like OISCA's volunteers who go work in rice cultivation together with the local farmers. So there are cases like this. We are going to have many university graduates in the future [in Japan], and

I think that instead of looking inwards, they should first jump into local communities; naked, so to speak, without special ideas or technical skills that would make them look at things from a superior position. No matter the problem, to help local people improve their livelihoods from within their own daily worries and lives. I really want to promote the spread of activities like this because this is what will create the foundation of [our country's] economic cooperation in the future. That is, to send [Japanese] youth, our future leaders, to other countries, especially youth who haven't been taught anything yet, but who come to understand things on their own by going into local communities, which I think will produce youth who have a strong sense of purpose in life. (Sanji 1978)

OISCA volunteers who work “together with the local farmers” were cited here as exemplars of what Japanese aid should look like. This politician was not the only one to refer to OISCA as a model of Japanese approaches to aid. In a hearing of the Cabinet Committee in 1985, Fujita Kimio—the director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Economic Cooperation Bureau (later reorganized as the International Cooperation Bureau) who eventually became the president of JICA—cited OISCA as an example of cooperation between the Japanese government and NGOs, a relationship to be promoted (Fujita 1985). Soon after, in 1987, OISCA became the first NGO to receive funds from the government's ODA budget in order to establish a vocational training center for women in Bangladesh (Ishibashi 1998). This grant foreshadowed the official Japanese ODA schemes for NGOs that began in 1989 with the establishment of the Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects and the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects. The emphasis on working intimately with local communities in “the field” (*gemba*) continues to be a core principle in aid officials' notions about Japanese approaches to aid. This history suggests that prominent politicians and state officials saw OISCA staffers as embodying “Japanese” approaches to development aid.

But let us take a step back for a moment. How did it come to be that a politician would mention OISCA as an exemplary organization for advancing Japanese approaches to development aid? Over the past half a century, OISCA has grown to become one of the most prominent Japanese NGOs. During a time when registering legally as a nonprofit organization was difficult, OISCA was able to become an incorporated foundation (*zaidan hōjin*) relatively quickly in 1969, subsequently receiving tax benefits and other advantages. Although the bulk of OISCA's financial base at the beginning came from membership fees and individual donations from OISCA members (*kai'in*) around the country, it is also significant that the NGO

began receiving a government subsidy (*kokko hojokin*) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1972 that continued until 2003.

One of the reasons OISCA grew in size and prominence was the political support it received from influential conservative politicians of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the ruling party in power for most of Japan's history after 1945, and affiliated political actors. In 1967, with the leadership of Prime Minister Satō Eisaku, LDP politicians formed the National Diet League to Promote OISCA's International Activities (OISCA Kokusai Katsudō Sokushin Kokkai Gi'in Renmei; hereafter, "OISCA Diet League") (OISCA 1967).¹⁷ As of 2011, the league had over fifty members, most of them LDP politicians. The national OISCA Diet League has also spread to regional levels, and dozens of politicians' leagues promote OISCA's activities at prefectural and city council levels across Japan. The functions of these associations are to advance OISCA's activities among lawmakers, bureaucrats, and other influential figures in Japan and overseas and, conversely, to provide politicians with opportunities to visit overseas project sites as a way to experience Japanese forms of NGO aid "on the ground." Furthermore, given that the OISCA Diet League has always included prominent LDP politicians such as Satō and other prime ministers, the associations have also offered ways to make and strengthen important alliances among conservative politicians.¹⁸ The support from Satō and the OISCA Diet League also facilitated OISCA's registration as an incorporated foundation.

But how were OISCA staffers able to gain support from a powerful conservative politician such as Satō Eisaku, especially during a time when NGOs were virtually nonexistent in Japan? The connections that I trace below between politicians and Yonosuke in the 1960s and beyond are important factors in understanding the extent to which the history of NGOs and international aid in Japan cannot be divorced from the history of new religious movements and politics.

Religious Leaders and Political Lineages

According to a senior OISCA staff member, the person who connected Yonosuke to powerful LDP politicians was a man named Furuta Jūjirō. Writings about him support this claim, as the backing of religious leaders such as Yonosuke fit into Furuta's political ambitions. Born in 1901, Furuta attended Nihon University and became an instructor. By 1958 he had reached the position of university chairman, the executive leader of the institution. He was responsible for the university's massive expansion

and financial reforms, which made it one of the largest universities in the country. He also prohibited all student political activities and did not allow the students' association to join the All-Japan Federation of Students' Self-Governing Associations, a communist and anarchist organization of student activists. This stance, in addition to a state investigation of his financial activities at the school, led to a massive student uprising in 1968. He died in 1970 (Nichigai Associates 2004; Ueda et al. 2001).

Nihon University was established in 1889 by Yamada Akiyoshi (1844–1892), the first minister of justice of Japan, and the institution always had strong connections with politicians and state actors. As chairman, Furuta made great use of these connections and nurtured a particularly strong alliance with Satō Eisaku, a leading member of the LDP and prime minister from 1964 to 1972. Satō and Furuta collaborated on many levels. For instance, they founded an association called Nippon-kai in 1962 to spearhead a movement for fostering world peace by emphasizing Japanese cultural values, which, its website asserts, naturally tend toward harmony.¹⁹ Satō mentions Furuta several times in his diaries, and it seems that Furuta attended not only Nippon-kai meetings with Satō but also informal and formal discussions with the prime minister regarding elections. The diaries indicate that the two men enjoyed a close relationship throughout Satō's career (Satō E. 1998a, 1998b).

Despite the general vilification of new religions in postwar Japan, Furuta saw religious leaders as valuable in supporting the Satō administration and the rise of conservative politics in 1960s Japan (Nakano T. 2003, 150–152). The end of World War II brought about unprecedented changes for religious groups, including former followers of Ōmoto such as Yonosuke. In particular, the sudden end of an authoritative government, along with the freedom of religion ensured by the new constitution, emboldened new religions to engage with public activities, most notably electoral politics. For instance, two candidates related to the new religion Tenrikyō were elected to the House of Representatives in 1946, and members of other new religious groups also entered political races (Nakano T. 2003, 144–145). Sōka Gakkai and its political party, Kōmeitō, are probably the most famous example, generating much debate, political maneuvering, and conflicts over the question of religious groups' participation in public affairs and politics (Ehrhardt et al. 2014). While many politicians and public figures opposed the engagement of religions with politics, others such as Furuta saw benefit in liaising with religious leaders, especially for votes, financial contributions, and human resources, at least to a certain extent and as long as the religion did not present a negative image for the politician. For new

religions, the links with politicians appeared even more beneficial, because they saw these relationships as a potential way to protect themselves from state interference. For Yonosuke, according to archival records and recollections from older staff members, relationships with politicians seemed to be not only a way to protect his religious movement but also a way to expand OISCA's global activities and even shape general understandings of international aid in Japan.

Satō's diaries from the 1960s suggest that he and his entourage saw a need to befriend leaders of new religions in order to consolidate the LDP's political influence in government and among the electorate. Starting in 1964 and 1965, for example, Satō approached Niwano Nikkyō from Risshō Kōseikai and Ikeda Daisaku from Sōka Gakkai, two of the largest new religions, to seek their support in various electoral campaigns. Religious groups were becoming a political force, and politicians in power were keen to bring these actors into their fold in order to strengthen the foundation of the conservative LDP faction. Entries in Satō's diary also mention meetings with Yonosuke and his successor, Yoshiko, a few times (e.g., Satō E. 1998c, 221; 1998d, 191). An article in the OISCA magazine from August 1968, announcing the opening of the Astronomy and Geology Technical School, carries congratulatory letters from various OISCA supporters, including a message from Furuta and LDP politicians. They express excitement about the opening of the school and its mission to educate Japanese youth spiritually as well as intellectually in "the great workings of the universe," through which "we may find true humanity" (OISCA 1968). Yonosuke's teachings evidently resonated with such powerful men, whether spiritually, politically, or ideologically.

The relationships between Furuta, Satō, and Yonosuke only scratch the surface of the vast network of politicians and business leaders who supported OISCA over the decades. Alliances among politicians, religious leaders, and other conservative public figures underwrote not only the political climate of the 1960s but also the environment within which an important pillar of Japan's international aid system emerged. What is particularly interesting about this history is that these people converged to support a Japanese NGO at a time when NGOs were not yet in the public consciousness in Japan. The relationship between new religious organizations and politics was strained after the 1960s, marked particularly by a scandal in 1970 in which an author alleged that he had been censored and intimidated by Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō officials, as well as by affiliated powerful politicians. The case sparked national outrage at the links between

religious and political actors, which allowed for such an “undemocratic” treatment of a citizen. Sōka Gakkai had to cut official ties with Kōmeitō (McLaughlin 2014, 75–76).

Nevertheless, the initial political connections in the 1960s greatly contributed to OISCA’s rise to prominence. Fundamentally, these early relationships established the perception and the reality among conservative political actors that supporting OISCA, especially through the OISCA Diet League, would place them in the same milieu as Satō and other powerful LDP politicians. Backing OISCA was also a way to advance a “Japanese” approach to development cooperation, defined in terms of mutual relations of *hitozukuri*, working closely with aid recipients in the field, and supposedly Japanese values such as discipline. As direct ties between politicians and religious groups became increasingly scrutinized by the media and the public after 1970, these reasons for and benefits of supporting OISCA—as well as the move to interpret the NGO’s Ananaikyō legacies in terms of nonreligious “Shinto” values—came to overshadow the fact that Yonosuke was a religious leader.

Although much evidence of OISCA’s political connections exists, it is important to note that these relationships might not have been easy or automatic. One senior OISCA staff member who went with the first team to India in the early 1960s explained to me that when the team visited the Japanese embassy in Delhi, the ambassador and embassy officials told them that they were being a nuisance (*meiwaku*) and that agricultural aid in India had proved difficult even for government agencies and thus was impossible for civic organizations such as OISCA. These officials told the OISCA volunteers to go back to Japan because they would become a national embarrassment. But, the staff member told me, OISCA participants continued their activities, since Ananaikyō members and OISCA staffers themselves financed these initial projects. Eventually, OISCA’s first staff members successfully increased agricultural production in their project sites and thereby gained recognition from the Japanese government. Ban Shōichi, who served as a diplomat in India and subsequently became one of the founders of JOCV, writes that during his time overseas he came to admire OISCA as a group of people who were so committed to their work that they devoted their whole lives to living with local villagers (Ban 1974). Similarly, in a 1974 essay, the former Delhi bureau chief of *Asahi shimbun*, one of the major newspapers in Japan, wrote about the “rugged, simple Japanese farmers” from OISCA who would bring fresh vegetables to important functions at the Japanese embassy. He reminisced how these

OISCA volunteers, who had experienced poverty in postwar rural Japan and could withstand the harsh conditions of rural India in ways that Europeans and Americans could not, presented a positive image of the Japanese overseas—an important diplomatic mission especially after World War II (Hayashi R. 1974, 87–89).

It does not matter so much if these stories were true or not. What is significant is that they traveled back to Japan through news correspondents and embassy officials, bolstering OISCA's reputation within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and aid agencies over time. Although OISCA enjoyed unparalleled support from prominent public figures, this was not simply an instance of top-down, government co-optation as the orthodox interpretation of civil society in Japan might suggest (C. Watanabe 2017a). The story indicates a lineage of relationships that Yonosuke and OISCA aid workers cultivated with effort, navigating various political interests and pushing forward their own definitions of what development aid work, based on the Great Spirit of the Universe, should look like. OISCA's relationship with the government may not be a horizontal one, but it is far from being a simple top-down structure.

The Value of Struggle

Despite the importance of Ananaikyō and of Yonosuke's role as a religious leader in the development and prominence of OISCA, the topic rarely came up in discussions among staffers during the time of my research. The public suspicion of new religions is widespread, and thus OISCA staffers' ability to articulate a vision outside the parameters of "religion" has been imperative for gaining wide public support and, perhaps more significantly, the understanding of newer staff members.²⁰ There was a palpable gap between older and younger generations, tensions between Ananaikyō and non-Ananaikyō staffers, and a general silence around OISCA's religious legacies, which foregrounded a prevailing sense of confusion and struggle among staffers.

For instance, many of the younger staff members did not understand the emphasis on a disciplined training program as the chosen method of development aid. From another perspective, senior staffers at times expressed resistance or incomprehension over the organizational changes required by the new legal registration and the more general direction toward professionalization. Yet others such as young Ananaikyō staff members—a rare group in OISCA—talked to me about their struggles to bridge the two worlds and two sets of concerns. Even before I posed a question about the

conflicting dynamics in the organization, staffers themselves were often already analyzing these tensions.

In an early conversation with a young non-Ananaikyō staff member, it became clear to me that the struggles generated by these various lines of tension and silence were central to people's commitments to their work and to OISCA. Takai-san was a man in his early thirties who had worked at training centers in Japan and Asia for a few years and was about to be posted overseas again when I met him in 2009. He told me that when he first joined OISCA through one of the training centers in Japan, the director sent him to the OISCA vocational college, where he first encountered the NGO's history. He spent a month and a half there learning about sustainable agriculture and OISCA's particular approach to international aid. But there was little talk about international aid, development studies, or other related topics. Instead, his classes consisted of lessons on Shinto and what it means to be Japanese in the contemporary world.

"For example," he said, "teachers told us that when Japanese people go overseas and are asked about their religion, they tend to answer that they have none, but that in most parts of the world, this answer would make people think that Japanese people are dangerous and immoral."

Even though he had been working in OISCA for a few months by then, Takai-san did not know that OISCA was related to a religious group until he participated in this short-term course. He told me that in seeing the Shinto shrine on the grounds of the vocational college and having to participate in the daily chanting of prayers (*norito*)—a practice that goes beyond the casual interaction with Shinto practices for most Japanese citizens—he thought that he might have joined a truly bizarre group.

"I was seriously scared that I might not leave this place alive!" he laughed. "A few years earlier there was the Aum incident, which had made our allergies against religion among young generations even stronger than before."

Nevertheless, as time passed, he gradually changed his mind.

"You know when you are a child and adults tell you that the sun [*otentō-sama*] is watching you if you do something wrong? The teachers at the vocational college told us that proverbs like that are Shinto teachings. So what they said was not that complicated or weird after all," he explained.

He eventually came to the conclusion that learning about OISCA's religious affiliation and philosophies simply showed him what was at the root of the NGO's activities. The influences of Ananaikyō were historical and nothing more, he decided.

Takai-san explained that his initial ambivalence about OISCA's religious links reflected a more general sense of incomprehension about the organization among young Japanese staff members. He observed:

For young people who are interested in development work in the normal sense of the word, working at the training centers seems like an unbearable amount of agricultural labor every day. . . . Many of the young people who joined OISCA at the same time that I did were interested in NGO management and such, and they quit in about a year.

I asked him what made it so difficult to work at the training centers. He described how staffers and trainees lived and worked together for a year under the same roof, and so staff members had to set an example: waking up at dawn in time for the morning routines, getting to meals at the set times, participating in cleaning duties, leading the agricultural work and field-based classes, giving lectures, and tending the fields. In that sense, Takai-san explained, trainees were constantly watching staff, and there was no time to rest. Even Sundays were taken up by administrative duties and other chores. Life was contained within the training center, and other social ties were nearly erased.

He admitted, "I always carry inside myself a sense of struggle [*kattō*] about my work in OISCA, and sometimes I wonder if there is any meaning to all of this." He continued:

But what I like is that, even though it is difficult, there are many things that you cannot understand if you do not spend all day with other people. Teaching "spiritual" [*seishin*] things to trainees depends on how you yourself are acting. For example, are you taking off your slippers neatly? Are you properly changing slippers for the first and second floors? There are many things in OISCA that have nothing to do with development aid. But then, trainees are really watching closely when someone does not do these things or follow the communal rules, and they point it out! They would say, "*Sensei* [teacher], you said this, but why aren't you doing it yourself?" I'd think, "Oh, you are so annoying . . . but you are so right" [*laughs*]. So I have come to realize that I have to act properly. . . . Being together with others all the time is a really difficult thing, but the difficulty of human relationships is part of the learning process here.

Despite his various misgivings, he had come to accept certain things about OISCA, such as the need to take off one's slippers in a certain way, as an

important rule to uphold and share with other staffers and trainees. He had found meaning in the daily struggle to live alongside the others, even going so far as to say that the Tokyo headquarters was “not really OISCA.” It was not OISCA without the struggle of living and working in intimate relations with others, and without the efforts to make sense of the communal lifestyle. The experience of discomfort and struggle was an important aspect of his understanding of aid work in OISCA and of the organization itself.

Takai-san’s words stayed with me for a long time. His commitment to his work revolved around a sense of daily battles in proximate relations with others. What he expressed also captured how aid actors in OISCA accepted and engaged with confusions, doubts, and uncertainties, such as those involving the organization’s contentious religious legacies. Of course, the struggles often also forced staff members out. But staff members’ commitment and recommitment to their work hinged on such moments when they had to pause and reconsider what it was that they were doing and why. Their discomfort and moments of reflection were entangled with the history of religion and politics in Japan and with arguments about nonreligious and so-called Japanese values. It is to these arguments that we turn in the next chapter, which explores the logic and implications of claiming a “Shinto” environmentalism.