

**Spiritual Business? A Critical Analysis of the Spiritual Therapy Phenomenon in  
Contemporary Japan**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
PhD

The University of Leeds  
School of Modern Languages and Cultures  
East Asian Studies

September 2010

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

My earliest memories of practising the Greek Orthodox religion into which I was born are those of fear. I still clearly remember standing behind the large door at the entrance of my grand-mother's house and crying as I refused to accompany my family to the church. The reason was neither some kind of demonic possession such as in the stories I encountered during my fieldwork in Japan, nor the deep aversion towards religious gatherings that I developed later in my life. The cause of my discontent was my fear of the fireworks thrown outside every Greek church just as the clock turns 12 on the night of the Great and Holy Saturday when Jesus's resurrection is welcomed with shouts of joy and congratulations among the Christians attending the service. My six-year old mind associated the deafening sound of the fireworks with church-going since, like most Greek families, we had been practising our religion only during the festive days of the Christmas and Easter holidays.

This "traumatic" image transformed as I grew up to a complete aversion to all things religious and to a subsequent conviction that science and reason hold the only truth. From my estrangement from my Orthodox culture since the age of eight, to the priest who, some years later, offered to help me sue my father for smoking cigarettes in front of me, and finally to a stormy relationship with a girl from another cultural background who taught me the meaning of religious fundamentalism, I was certain that, by the time I considered applying for a doctoral degree, my research focus could be anything but spiritual therapy. Yet, thinking now retrospectively, I can see how my complete disconnection with transcendental beliefs of any kind later led to my astonishment when I rediscovered through my postgraduate studies the therapeutic

claims of, in that instance, South-East Asian shamanistic rituals. At that point, faith-based practices felt so foreign that my old obsession with renouncing them transformed into pure curiosity when the possibility of crossing swords with a past “enemy” promised to bring, not only an end to a personal feud, but also to contribute to research on the growing popularity of alternative therapies around the globe.

The cultural psychologist Miyaji Naoko, reflecting on her fieldwork activities among the shamans of Miyako Island (south-west of Okinawa), suggests that the only prerequisite to writing an ethnography consists of saving the memory of the ‘curiosity [and] astonishment’ first felt at the ‘entrance to the field.’ And she adds that ethnography is ‘a performance showing the relation between the researcher in his field and the researcher back home, a narrative of the process of formation (change?) [*sic*] of his identity’ (Miyaji, 1998, 232).

In my subject of research, as I hope to demonstrate in this thesis, it is almost impossible to lose this astonishment, considering the richness and inventiveness of techniques and theories used by the Japanese practitioners whom I propose to discuss. Most significantly, however, I realized that eventually there was no winner or loser in this, dare I say, classic battle between reason and faith, science and religion. It was just me finally coming to terms with and accepting the natural coexistence of the two.

This research would never have been completed without the assistance of my supervisors in Leeds, Professor Victor T. King and Professor Mark B. Williams. I am grateful to them for believing in me from the very start of this endeavour and for always commenting on every piece of writing I sent to them despite the numerous language mistakes that they often contained. I would also like to express my gratitude to

Professor James H. Grayson from the University of Sheffield, and to Professor Ikegami Yoshimasa at Komazawa University for introducing me to Japan's academic world and for teaching me the value of time spent in fieldwork rather than in theoretical discussions which could hardly ever describe the plurality and richness of the spiritual therapy phenomenon. Several researchers contributed through their advice and support to this study: Professor Choe Kilsong at Tōa University, Professor Shimoji Akitomo at Kumamoto Gakuin University, Dr Eguchi Shigeyuki at Musashino Hospital, Professors Noda Fumitaka and Yumiyama Tatsuya at Taishō University, Assistant Professor Horie Norichika at the University of the Sacred Heart, Professor Inoue Nobutaka and Dr Hirafuji Kikuko at Kokugakuin University, Professor Suzuki Masataka at Keio University, Professor Shimazono Susumu at Tokyo University, Professor Paul Heelas at Lancaster University and many others who often informally informed my understanding of spiritual therapy in Japan.

I remain deeply indebted to the people who accepted, in very short spans of time, to share with me what frequently were life-changing experiences and business practices that were rarely divulged to their clients. This thesis really belongs to them.

And finally, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Mike Parnwell, Terry King, Jane Caple, Alberto Camarena, Jenni Rauch, Martin and Ning Seeger who created the warm and psychologically supportive environment that made these last three years an exciting adventure.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Katerina Kouli-Gaitanidi, who never doubted me, and to Miyuki Hahakabe, who silently supported me in my most anxious moments.

### Abstract

In the last fifteen years and particularly since the rise to media stardom of self-proclaimed “spiritual counsellor” Ehara Hiroyuki, “the spiritual” (*supirichuaru*) has become a buzzword in Japanese popular culture. A look at the shelves of every bookstore reveals that by now, in Japan, almost anything can be “spiritual” (for example, spiritual spot, spiritual money, spiritual motherhood or spiritual cuisine).

This “spiritual boom” has stemmed from the popularisation of what this study calls spiritual therapies, which correspond to the group of alternative therapeutic techniques that, in the West, are characteristic of the New Age Movement. Examples of spiritual therapy include past-life regression therapy, *reiki*, channelling and re-connective healing. The increase in demand and consumption of such techniques has recently attracted criticism from local researchers who warn against the pitfalls of the “spiritual business”; yet, so far, everyone has failed to take into account the voices of those who are supposed to gain from these transactions: the spiritual therapists.

Using information collected during interviews with 68 practitioners and participant observation of spiritual therapy sessions and promotional fairs, this study argues that the popularity of the spiritual therapy phenomenon epitomises deeper changes in contemporary Japanese society.

A critical analysis shows that, in order to avoid biased support for, or criticism against spiritual therapy, the phenomenon should be seen through its *point de capiton*, where the interaction of its four aspects, the business, the therapeutic, the ideological and the social, gives us a full and meaningful view. Consequently it becomes clear that spiritual therapy has developed according to the fundamental features of a globalising

new spirituality culture and expresses the morality of the fundamental this-worldly-benefit-seeking character of Japanese religious culture, which is adapted to express the physiomorphic, ideological and socio-economic changes in contemporary Japanese society.

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## Chapter 1: The Mainstreaming of a Japanese Occulture

Mr Suzuki<sup>1</sup> is a middle-aged man, casually dressed, lighting cigarettes one after the other as he sits across the table in a lavish coffee shop five minutes on foot from Shinjuku station in central Tokyo. His business card says ‘spiritual advisor’ written in *katakana*, the Japanese syllabary used for foreign words. A friend provided me with the e-mail address of Mr Suzuki’s mobile phone, saying that he is the “real thing”. Two months later and after a couple of suddenly cancelled appointments, here I am, early in the afternoon on an autumn day, asking Mr Suzuki for his advice about my future professional life and wedding prospects.

In the next hour, Mr Suzuki occasionally passing his hand over my name written on the back of his business card, will have visions of the three ancestor-guardian spirits floating above my head, of my past life as a primary school teacher, and of my future career in Japanese academia. Mr Suzuki will make some right and wrong guesses about my personality, he will give me some general advice on how to lead a healthy life and encourage me to visit the graves of my grand-parents to show my gratitude. When the time is up, I shall hand Mr Suzuki the fee of ¥5,000<sup>2</sup> and part with him at the exit of the building.

For me, a researcher who had originally studied - and been prepared to undertake fieldwork - among Japanese traditional shamanistic practitioners, most famously described for Western readers in Carmen Blacker’s *The Catalpa Bow* (1999, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition),

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<sup>1</sup> All informants are given pseudonyms (see Appendix 4).

<sup>2</sup> The average currency exchange rate for 2009 (when most of my fieldwork was undertaken) was 146¥ to the pound.

Mr Suzuki consisted of something new. Yet, functionally, his practices were not very dissimilar from the ritual of the *itako*, a type of shaman I had observed the previous summer in the north of the country and who, specializing in the mediumship of the dead, had allowed me to speak to the soul of my late grand-father. What convinced me to make Tokyo's spiritual therapists (as I later called them) the entire focus of my thesis rather than one third of it (as I had planned in the first place), was Mr Suzuki's popularity and that of the increasing number of professionals offering similar services in Japan's big cities, in sharp contrast with the decreasing presence of more traditional practitioners such as the *itako*. An on-line inventory that I used to contact many of my informants listed more than a thousand specialists like Mr Suzuki, across the country, whereas only four *itako* attended last summer's festival that had rendered them famous less than a hundred years ago at Mt. Osore (in Aomori prefecture) (Fackler, 2009).

In the 12 months following my meeting with Mr Suzuki, I tried to learn as much as I could about the various practices of the spiritual therapists who had chosen to earn their living by offering counselling services based on their "supernatural" powers. I am almost certain, of course, that the existence of people like Mr Suzuki does not sound entirely unfamiliar to the average individual living in Britain today. All of us have at some point seen on television or read in some journal about extrasensory perceptions and supernatural powers, such as being able to communicate with the dead, see the future or the past, read minds, or bend spoons and heal by the mere use of one's hands. In the last few decades the media have been particularly assiduous in using these types of belief to entertain the masses and cash in on their popularity. For example, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2009, on UK's satellite channel Sky One, spiritual medium Derek Acorah attempted to contact the ghost of Michael Jackson for the fans present on the set and for

the 680,000<sup>3</sup> television viewers who were looking for some late Friday night entertainment. For many, Derek Acorah had been the star of the long running British paranormal documentary reality television show *Most Haunted*, which was launched in May 2002 and in which Derek has been presenting a weekly investigation into paranormal activities in allegedly haunted locations. In 2005, following complaints of deception, TV watchdog Ofcom declared that ‘*Most Haunted* is an entertainment show, not a legitimate investigation into the paranormal, and should not be taken seriously.’<sup>4</sup> Indeed, by that time Acorah had already been caught at least twice trying to contact, at the request of a fellow parapsychologist, the spirits of Kreed Kafer and Rik Eedles, who later were revealed to be anagrams for ‘Derek Faker’ and ‘Derek Lies.’

On the other side of the planet, in Japan, on 4 April 2005, spiritual counsellor Ehara Hiroyuki, became the star of a new show called ‘The Fountain of Aura’ (*ōra no izumi*) in which he “read” the aura and past-life, as well as conversed with the guardian spirit (*shugorei*) of the celebrity-guest in order to advise him or her on life issues and future prospects. The show became so popular that two years later it was rescheduled from the Wednesday 11pm slot to the Saturday prime time slot of 8pm, where for a while, it received in the Kantō<sup>5</sup> area high audience ratings of around 15 per cent<sup>6</sup>. As I shall discuss later in more detail, Ehara has been a major figure in the media and a

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<sup>3</sup> Broadcasters’ Audience Research Board visited online on the 5 December 2009 at <http://www.barb.co.uk/report/weeklyTopProgrammesOverview?>

<sup>4</sup> BBC News, 5 December 2005.

<sup>5</sup> The central-eastern part of Honshū island where more than 30 per cent of Japan’s population is concentrated, covering the prefectures of Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma, Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo and Kanagawa.

<sup>6</sup> 15 per cent of audience ratings in the Kantō area correspond to approximately 2,640,000 households. (see <http://www.videor.co.jp/rating/wh/13.htm> visited on 5 December 2009).

significant influence among Japanese spiritual communities during the last decade. It is also worth noting that in the late 1980s, Ehara came to London to study at the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain where he met one of the most famous British psychics of the past century, Doris Collins (1918-2003), who is said to have given him the following advice: ‘like me in the UK, be the pioneer who will transmit to the people of Japan the truth’ (Ehara, 2003, 213).

However, the paranormal, the para-scientific, “the spiritual” does not merely concern consumer culture. It concerns other parts of our lives: from the 800 magic wands sold for £19 million by a British company to the Iraqi military to search for explosives at checkpoints (Goldacre, 2009), to the ¥15 million spent by Japan Rail East to install blue LEDs above platforms hoping to soothe the passengers and avoid suicide attempts, while admitting that ‘there is no scientific proof that blue lights will help deter suicides’ (Yuasa, 2009), instruments and concepts that have escaped scientific scrutiny are used on a daily basis. And the most obvious areas of their use can be found in alternative medicine, such as acupuncture, homeopathy and chiropractic therapy, to cite the most famous and well established therapies. Of course I do not intend here to criticise and disapprove of these methods. They exist and have constantly been defended by influential figures: Prince Charles, for example, is a known advocate of alternative therapies; in fact, the recently published, controversial, yet alarming, book by Simon Singh and Edzard Ernst<sup>7</sup> on the absence of medical research results to back up Prince Charles’s claims is ironically dedicated to him.

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<sup>7</sup> Trick or Treatment? Alternative medicine on trial (2009).

My objective in this chapter lies, firstly in presenting the defining features of a phenomenon that has contributed strongly to the ideology behind the various practices mentioned above, namely the New Age movement, and then in introducing the concept of “spiritual business” that corresponds to the financial aspect of these practices and which forms the entrance point to my discussion of spiritual therapy in contemporary Japan. After an analysis of larger theoretical concepts that account for the presence of the New Age movement, its Japanese counterpart-phenomenon and the “spiritual business”, the introductory chapter will move into a brief discussion of the recent Japanese historical background that provoked what can be called a mainstreaming of New Age concepts into popular culture. Finally, an introduction to the characteristic features of this mainstreaming, which has given birth to “the spiritual”, that is an “evolved” version of the Japanese New Age movement, will lead me into an examination of Japanese scholarship on shamanism, thus rounding off my literature review of the spiritual therapy phenomenon, before presenting my research questions and the structure of this thesis.

### **1.1. Prime minister or para-minister?**

Immediately after the 2009 general elections in Japan, Hatoyama Miyuki, wife of the newly elected Prime Minister, Hatoyama Yukio, made it to the ‘Top 10 Most Colourful First Spouses’ in *Time* magazine because, in a book published in 2008, ‘she claimed that in her sleep aliens took her soul to the planet Venus, which she described as being very green.’<sup>8</sup> As the article discusses, Hatoyama Miyuki had been known for her spiritualist background among internet bloggers and fans of the occult, but what the

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<sup>8</sup> *Time*, 7 September 2009.



journalist of *Time* magazine fails to develop sufficiently is the presence of former Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio himself in that 2008 publication. Indeed, in *The most bizarre things I've encountered* (*Watashi ga deatta yo ni mo fushigi na dekgoto*) in which Hatoyama Miyuki narrates her aforementioned “bizarre” experience on page 269, her husband also provides his views on the ‘invisible world’ (*mienai sekai*):

I used to think that science will reveal the truth about everything, but in reality it is fair to say that science hasn't solved anything. For example the existence of *ki*<sup>9</sup>, which is invisible and not scientifically proven, can in fact explain the occurrence of various phenomena. (...) Japan remains indifferent to such things, while in the United States and Russia, scientific research on these phenomena is nationally funded. Science stresses the importance of reproducibility. (...) But, no individual is similar to any other. Therefore, the reactions of person A and person B to the same experiment may be different. However, this experiment scientifically would be qualified as non-reproducible, and would not be supported by the country's budget. In America, an appropriate budget is administered to alternative medicine and it looks like that sector will become mainstream. Even East Asian medicine receives more money from national funds than in Japan, where that sector should have been our country's speciality. (...) In Japan, once, gods used to be found everywhere. In the forests and in the mountains there used to be gods, and therefore those locations were forbidden to humans. (...) The belief that humans as part of nature have to live harmoniously with all living beings came about naturally. (...) Nowadays gods have lost out to money. Fear towards transcendental beings and nature has been lost. (...) I want to build a system that will spread among adults and children the belief in harmonious coexistence with nature. (...) My objective is not to make a better Democratic Party of Japan, but a better Japan (Hatoyama and Ikeda, 2008, 264-266).

In 1993, Hatoyama created with other non-partisan Diet members, the Research Association on *ki* (*Ki no kenkyūkai*) (Saitō, 2000, 194), which was later renamed the Association of Human Science (*Ningen saiensu no kai*) and had its 101<sup>st</sup> lecture entitled

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<sup>9</sup> *ki* or *chi* is the life-force/vital energy flowing through all living beings which forms the basis of many alternative therapeutic techniques, from acupuncture to *reiki*.

‘the proof of the existence of meridians<sup>10</sup> and prana<sup>11</sup> healing’ in one of the meeting rooms of the Lower House on 15 January 2009.<sup>12</sup> The Association of Human Science is today part of the International Society of Life Information Science (ISLIS)<sup>13</sup>, founded in 1996 and for which Hatoyama acts as a special advisor. The English version of the ISLIS founding prospectus<sup>14</sup> includes the following statement: ‘there seems to be an increased awareness about the possible existence of phenomena that related (*sic*) to the realm of consciousness, spirit and mind-phenomena that cannot be explained nor understood in the conventional, twentieth century paradigm.’ Figuring on the same page, the society’s main research fields contain ‘qigong and qi, latent talents, meditation and parapsychological phenomena’, to cite but a few.

From the above, it becomes clear that Hatoyama shares many of his wife’s opinions and is inclined to spread the word to others. Yet, the Hatoyamas are neither an exception nor a novelty. The mistrust towards scientific achievement, the will to return to the old days of harmonious coexistence with nature, the belief in the latent capacities of human beings are all well versed concepts of what, in our part of the globe, has been popularly known as the New Age Movement and which, for the last two decades, has been increasingly observed in Japan under different appellations bearing both common and different characteristics from its Western counterpart. Japanese New Agers do, in fact, like Hatoyama, believe that Japan lags behind, particularly in comparison with the

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<sup>10</sup> Meridians are the channels inside our body in which *ki*, the vital energy, is said to flow.

<sup>11</sup> Yogic term bearing similar meaning to *ki*.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://iarp.or.jp/kouen/page2.html> (visited on 6 December 2009)

<sup>13</sup> See <http://wwwsoc.nii.ac.jp/islis/sjis/islis.htm> (visited on 6 December 2009)

<sup>14</sup> See <http://wwwsoc.nii.ac.jp/islis/en/about/shuiE.htm> (visited on 6 December 2009)

Anglo-Saxon countries, in terms of popular acceptance of the existence of an “invisible world” and concerning research related to phenomena still disapproved by science. Yet, in the last decade, and particularly since the rise to television stardom of Ehara Hiroyuki, Japanese interest in what was first popularly known as ‘the world of the spiritual’ (*seishin sekai*) and currently is just called ‘the spiritual’ (*supirichuaru*) has increased dramatically.

The New Age Movement has attracted mainly the attention of British and other European scholars who, since the mid-1990s have published extensive studies on the phenomenon (see Hanegraaff [1996] and Hammer [2004] for the most detailed monographs), the most influential of which remains to this day Paul Heelas’s thesis of the New Age Movement as a sacralisation of the self. The author summarizes the characteristics of the movement as follows:

New Agers see the person divided into that which belongs to artifices of society and culture and that which belongs to the depths of human nature. Inspired by spiritual disciplines or practices rather than by dogmas, beliefs or codified moralities, participants become *aware* of what they are (...) Ultimacy – God, the Goddess, the Higher Self – lies within, serving as the source of vitality, creativity, love, tranquillity, wisdom, responsibility, power and all those other qualities which are held to comprise the perfect inner self and which, when applied in daily practice (supposedly) ensure that all is utopian (...) A new *consciousness*, and all that it brings with it, is essential (...) as an *internalized* form of religiosity, the New Age is (...) detraditionalized. That is to say, *autonomy* and *freedom* are highly valued; and *authority* lies with the experience of the Self (...) Detraditionalization is also associated with the Movement’s *perennialized* outlook, namely that the same wisdom can be found at the heart of all religious traditions (1996, 28-29).

The shift to this new consciousness is usually promoted through spiritual and physical healing practices which are based on two important assumptions: that positive thinking most effectively produces change and that negative experiences are illusory and that it is within human ability to change them to positive ones (Pike, 2004, 23). In

order to do this, New Agers usually seek the assistance of psychic healers: individuals who draw on their personal powers or work with the help of power animals and spirit guides to see into the future, diagnose illnesses and lead their clients on the path to personal transformation (ibid, 25). Many of the spiritual therapists in this thesis could have been called ‘psychic healers’ in a Western setting. And the majority of them also act, like their American counterparts, as channels/communicators for a variety of beings: from Gods and Goddesses of the Egyptian, Greek, Norse, Asian and Theosophical (for example Maitreya) pantheon to angels drawn from the Jewish and Christian religious traditions, pagan entities found in fairy tale books, and of course the channelling beings rendered popular in the first years of the New Age Movement such as Seth (channelled by Jane Roberts during the 1960s) or Ramtha (made famous through the channeller J.Z. Knight). A quite personal relationship can be simultaneously maintained with one of these entities, which acts as a guardian spirit, and the “Higher Self”. Wouter J. Hanegraaff defines the Higher Self as ‘the mediating link between man and God (...) it is more personal than God yet more universal than man (...) it is our real identity (...) conscious connection with one’s Higher Self leads to increased insight, spirituality, love, balance and health’ (1996, 211) .

This eclecticism in the New Age Movement and the relativism that it implies through its acceptance of a personal truth without rejecting other truths, has been the major point of criticism bestowed upon the phenomenon by Western and Japanese scholars alike. Steve Bruce, for example, argues that the New Age fits well with a society which is short on authority and long on consumer rights, and in which individualistic epistemology, consumerist ethos and therapeutic focus resonate with the rest of our modern capitalist culture (2000, 231, 234). Focussing especially on the

business aspect of the movement, Carrette and King consider the New Age activities as ‘expressions of capitalism, aimed at fulfilling the consumerist self and entirely based on the “fraudulent” promotion of unrestrained desire-fulfilment as the key of happiness’ (2005, 21). This ‘ethos of bricolage’ (Van Hove, 1999, 166) is most apparently expressed in events, such as the Mind Body Spirit Festival<sup>15</sup> held yearly in London since 1977, which serve as showcasing opportunities for new products and services and create ‘a strong sense of the force and significance of the alternative world view’ (Hamilton, 2000, 194). The criticism of the corresponding Japanese version of these festivals forms a major component of the work of sociologist of religion, Sakurai Yoshihide, about what he calls the ‘spiritual business’ and which represents the starting point of this thesis.

In his critical work, *Rei to kane: Supirichuaru bijinesu no kōzō* (Spirits and Cash: The Structure of the Spiritual Business), Sakurai defines spiritual business as follows:

[O]ur society is drowning in various types and forms of healing based on distinct Japanese notions of spirits and commemoration/exorcism techniques, as well as on spiritualist concepts and rituals imported from abroad. To the urban *ogamiya* (a traditional Japanese type of shamanistic practitioner *n.o.a*) and fortune-tellers, one can add every type of therapy advertised on internet websites that pop up when inserting the word ‘spiritual’ (*supirichuaru*) in an online search engine (...) I call all these forms of transactions, the ‘spiritual business’ (2009b, 10).

Sakurai’s argument is based firstly on two case studies of a well-known type of fraud committed by religious organisations, in this instance the Shinsekai and the Unification Church, which sell charms or run healing salons asking exorbitant prices to

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.mindbodyspirit.co.uk/>

finance their activities and increase their membership. For example, following the discovery that one of the author's colleagues at Hokkaido University had opened a healing salon at his home and was using his position to boost his clientèle, Sakurai discusses the case of the Shinsekai Ltd., a company established in 2000 by a non-registered religious organisation, The Church of the Thousand Arm Kannon<sup>16</sup> (*senju kannon kyōkai*). Shinsekai and its several affiliate companies were found to be running about 130 healing salons nationwide and, by the beginning of 2008, they were the target of several thousand individual complaints claiming total damages of 10 billion yen. In these salons, clients start by paying between ¥3000 and ¥10000, depending on the length of the session (for example 20 minutes cost ¥3000) and the experience of the healer, to receive a healing energy called 'spiritual light' (*reikō*). Convinced that they require regular therapy, clients then visit the Shinsekai's salon on a monthly basis until they are told that, by buying a beginner's license for the price of ¥105,000, they will be able to heal others and run their own salons (Sakurai, 2009b, 30-32). One can imagine that eventually, by acquiring higher level licenses (the expert license costs ¥525,000) and bringing friends, buying amulets, holding special healing rituals for the family and the like, the client ends up paying a fortune. A website opened by a victim of the Shinsekai reports that a healing salon in Sapporo earned ¥73 million for the year 2006<sup>17</sup>.

The last part of Sakurai's work discusses the far less researched subject that informs this thesis: the independent professionals of the spiritual business. Sakurai uses a case study of an event called 'spiritual convention'. *Supicon*, as it is popularly known,

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<sup>16</sup> Buddhist deity of mercy.

<sup>17</sup> see <http://www.geocities.co.jp/Technopolis/9575/vivid2.html>

is a trade fair for all fortune-tellers, spiritual counsellors and other similar practitioners. It was first opened in 2002 and as Sakurai reports, in 2008, it was organised at 60 different locations nationwide and was attended by nearly one million visitors (2009b, 139). Sakurai, who bases his argument on personal observations, having participated three times in the *supicon* of Sapporo-city, calculates that such an event, held over two days, should make a net profit of several hundred thousand yen, based on an entrance fee of ¥1500, a daily average attendance of 350 people, an average 50 professional booths paying ¥10,000 each, a daily rent of the convention centre of ¥600,000 and several hundred thousand yen of royalties (ibid, 142). Sakurai also observes that one can easily spend ¥10,000 per day, considering that prices for each session at *supicon*'s booths vary from ¥1,000 to ¥5,000.

Sakurai's argument represents the most recent of a series of critical studies (Kayama, 2006 ; Koike, 2007b ; Ikeda, 2007 ; Ishii, 2008 ; Sakurai, 2009b ; Isomura, 2007) which seek to discover and understand the reasons behind and at the same time issue a warning of the dangers of the recent spiritual boom in Japan, which began slowly about a decade ago, and reached its peak with the launch of Ehara Hiroyuki's TV show in 2005. Contrary to previous critical studies, which mainly focus on the equally interesting dubious effects, ideological paradoxes and sociological consequences of the recent surge of spiritual publications, TV shows and salons, Sakurai attempts to shed some light on the financial aspect of the phenomenon, which is arguably very difficult to evaluate. Unfortunately, *Spirits and Cash* possesses, from the first sentence, the tone of a sermon designed to attract the reader's attention to the most dangerous aspects of the spiritual business to the extent that eventually everything related to the phenomenon is tainted with the smell of fraud. Without wishing to deny the importance of these

warnings, it has to be noted that Sakurai did not interview any owners of healing salons. Indeed the testimonies of victims of salons run by larger religious organisations seem to have shaped the entire image of the spiritual business for Sakurai, who does not take his research any further than sending his students to try to get as much information as possible from practitioners at the spiritual convention ‘without paying’ (2009b, 151) and listening to a few talks by self-proclaimed ‘spiritual teachers’ at the same event (ibid, 152).

In contrast my critical analysis will attempt to demonstrate that, from the perspective of the independent practitioners participating in such festivals, the spiritual business is a much more complicated endeavour than that which Sakurai wishes to imply. I call these practitioners, ‘spiritual therapists’ basing my appellation on the popularity of the use of the term “spiritual” in Japan (see later sections in this chapter) and on the majority of my informants’ desire to be addressed as “therapists” in the sense of ‘helping the patient to reach a condition that (s)he wishes for, whether (s)he has actual serious health issues or not (...) the effects of this process having not been subject to scientific scrutiny’ (Harukawa, 2009, 192). The growing popularity of these spiritual therapists should be an incentive for researchers to provide a more in-depth analysis of the phenomenon in order to understand it better. Before I attempt this, I need first to locate this Japanese version of the spiritual business in socio-religious concepts wider than the New Age Movement, which will allow me to define the characteristics of the Japanese setting in which the aforementioned spiritual boom is taking place.



## **1.2. The setting: occulture or new spirituality culture**

My task in trying to explain, in a few pages, the link between the spiritual therapists of Tokyo, British and Japanese TV shows on the paranormal, popular para-scientific and para-medical practices, and the ideas advanced by former Prime Minister Hatoyama will be greatly facilitated by the use of the concept of ‘occulture’.

Christopher Partridge uses ‘occulture’ as a more precise and relevant terminology for contemporary discourse than ‘cultic milieu’, although both terms refer to the concept developed by Colin Campbell in the early 1970s and subsequently very often used in the sociology of religion and particularly in studies of the New Age Movement and spirituality in the contemporary world. Campbell attempting at the time, to find a general theory answering to the ‘continual process of (religious) cult formation and collapse’ (1972, 121), wrote: ‘cults must exist within a milieu which (...) is continually giving birth to new cults, absorbing the debris of the dead ones and creating new generations of cult-prone individuals’ (ibid, 121). And as to how this “cultic milieu” is sustained, Campbell suggested ‘the cultic world is kept alive by the magazines, periodicals, books, pamphlets, lectures, demonstrations and informal meetings through which its beliefs and practices are discussed and disseminated’ (ibid, 123). There therefore exists a certain culture of the occult, which today, as I have already hinted at by briefly showing some commonalities between British and Japanese psychics or political figures, has become global; it is a pool of deviant ideas and practices constantly fuelled and renewed by established organisations, networks and individuals, and from which the new organisations, networks and individuals select their authoritative sources. More concretely, Partridge considers for example that Western occulture includes ‘extreme right-wing religio-politics, radical environmentalism and deep ecology, angels,

spirit guides and channelled messages, astral projection, crystals, dream therapy, human potential spiritualities, the spiritual significance of ancient and mystical civilizations, astrology, healing, earth mysteries, tarot, numerology, Kabbalah, feng-shui, prophecies (e.g. Nostradamus), Arthurian legends, the Holy Grail, Druidry, Wicca, Heathenism, palmistry, shamanism, goddess spirituality, Gaia spirituality and eco-spirituality, alternative science, esoteric Christianity, UFOs, alien abduction, and so on' (2006, 70).

Occulture therefore is not a religion, but a unitary concept which, as shown in the above list, encompasses often contradictory, but always deviant beliefs. For this reason, it has been sometimes understood as synonymous with the New Age Movement, in the sense that as Hanegraaff suggests, the New Age Movement represents a specific historical stage in the development of occulture (1996, 16). This historical stage starts with the countercultural revolution of the 1960s, which, in its various representations such as the feminist and peace demonstrations, anti-Christian feelings and interest in Eastern religions and philosophies, re-activated and re-actualized in the 1970s existing Western esoteric concepts and practices. This Western esotericism can be traced back to earlier streams of thought and practice such as gnosticism, the post-Enlightenment esotericism of mesmerism and swedenborgianism, romanticism, the nineteenth century occultism of Magnetism, Theosophy, Christian science and later New Thought (which remained influential well into the twentieth century), and even the apocalyptic UFO-cults of the 1950s<sup>18</sup>.

The result of this re-awakening was the development of the New Age, an eclectic, amorphous, founder-less movement that was described by its most famous

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<sup>18</sup> The introductory part of Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis (ed.) *Handbook of New Age* provides a comprehensive overview of the different definitions attached to the New Age Movement.

spokesperson, David Spangler, as ‘a country fair, a collection of differently coloured and designed booths spread about a meadow, with the edges of the fair dissolving into the forested wilderness beyond’ (1993, 80). This description could also be applied to the concept of occulture, but other authors (see Kaplan and Löow, 2002) disagree with Hanegraaff and define the term in a much broader sense, including in it, for example, the contemporary remnants of Western esotericism (some were listed in the previous paragraph), or, as Partridge does, emphasizing its other streams, in this instance, Paganism (2006, 78-84). What concerns me here, however, is not the precise composition of this culture, but its significance as a milieu in which I can locate the existence of the spiritual.

First, however, considering that my area of focus is neither Europe nor the United States, where both the New Age Movement and the concept of “cultic milieu” were developed, but Japan, I will need to qualify the concept of occulture in cultural terms. Fortunately, I can rely on Shimazono Susumu, a prominent figure in the study of new spiritualities and religious movements in Japan, who, faced with the difficulty of explaining shared characteristics between local new religions, the New Age Movement and its Japanese version called “the world of the spiritual” (*seishin sekai*), reached, I believe, the same conclusion as Colin Campbell and Christopher Partridge. Shimazono referred to his “occulture” as ‘new spirituality movements and culture’ or simply ‘new spirituality culture’ (*shin-reisei bunka*)<sup>19</sup> hoping to solve the vagueness of what he considered *emic* terms (particularly the term “world of the spiritual”) and the dissatisfaction of many of the participants of either the New Age Movement or “the

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<sup>19</sup> Shimazono uses alternatively the terms new spirituality movements and culture, new spirituality movements, and new spirituality culture (2007b, 48); here I have chosen to adopt ‘new spirituality culture’ due to its similarity with the concept of “occulture”.

world of the spiritual” at being identified by such appellations (2007b, 47)<sup>20</sup>. The author, as he notes, aimed at coining a universal term: ‘it is inappropriate to equate the phenomenon of the Japanese world of the spiritual with the New Age Movement in the United States. Nor is it correct to view them as independent phenomena (...) it is better that they be grouped together under a common term, since they are similar in terms of cultural and religious phenomena’ (Shimazono, 1999, 124-125). Although Shimazono does not refer to the concept of cultic milieu, I suggest here that his identification of a global culture, a non-religious ‘loose network of like-minded individuals’ (ibid, 130), expresses the same idea, regardless of the regional particularities and appellations, that the world since the 1970s has witnessed the advent of a new spirituality, a global re-enchantment that challenges both the capitalistic and rationalistic functions of the nation, and the established salvationist religions (Shimazono, 2007b, 40); it expresses itself by a turn inwards to an ‘inner spirituality’ (Heelas, 1996, 19). Paul Heelas, who has recently chosen a more appropriate term, ‘spiritualities of life’ (2008), considers it to have originated in the massive subjective turn of modern culture (borrowing the term from Charles Taylor), which consists of ‘a shift of emphasis, from obeying or conforming to external (over-and-above the self) sources of authority to developing and expressing one’s own subjective life’ (2006, 223-224).

In sum, and to rephrase the above, this turn-inwards used as resources for expression the local and global existing deviant, occult beliefs and, hence, it activated a global occulture. Several surveys attest to this and show that former Prime Minister

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<sup>20</sup> Several Japanese words are translated as “spiritual” in this thesis. My informants unanimously used the Japanese transliteration *supirichuaru*. Shimazono and other researchers prefer to use *reiseiteki* (靈性的), which would be the corresponding Japanese term, as it stems from *reisei*, meaning “spirituality”. The popular use of *seishin* (精神), similarly to the English word ‘spirit’, may refer to a variety of concepts: heart, soul or mind.

Hatoyama's declarations have become more mainstream than they may sound. Before I look in more detail at the evidence of a Japanese occulture, let us briefly look at Europe and the United States. In his recent book Paul Heelas provides a very useful appendix summarizing the most prominent surveys (2008, 233-235) from which we learn that to the question 'Which of these statements comes closest to your beliefs?', 21 per cent of respondents to the 'Soul of Britain' 2000 survey selected the option 'There is some sort of spirit or life force' and 23 per cent the 'There is something there' option. As for Sweden and Denmark, the 1995/6 World Values Survey showed that 56 per cent of the population believed in God in a different way from that taught by institutional religions. In this survey approximately one fourth of the populations of the neighbouring countries of Norway and Finland also described themselves as 'spiritual but non-religious'.

The same is true for the U.S. population. Indeed a 2009 poll by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life<sup>21</sup> found that 24 per cent of Americans believe in reincarnation, 23 percent consider yoga to be a spiritual exercise, 26 per cent believe in spiritual energy located in natural things and 25 per cent trust astrology. The same survey shows that the percentage of Americans who feel they were in touch with someone dead has increased from 17 per cent in 1990 to 29 per cent in 2009, while the proportion (15 per cent) of those who have consulted a fortune-teller or psychic has only slightly increased during the same span of time.

What do we mean, however, by 'spiritual' or 'spirituality'? Hanegraaff defines spirituality as 'any human practice, which maintains contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning by way of the

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=490#4> (visited on the 7 January 2010)

individual manipulation of symbolic systems' (2000, 296). Shimazono prefers the more practical definition of Kubotera Toshiyuki, who argues that 'spirituality is the mechanism of looking to a new connection with something bigger than the self in order to find hope and the power to surmount the fear of death' (2000, 13). The younger generations of Japanese sociologists of religion prefer a more essentialist approach: 'spirituality is the feeling or consciousness of, or also the practice that brings self-transformation through the connection with a super-natural (or individually inner) being or power' (Ōtani, 2004, 14). The above definitions, although relevant in understanding the use of "spirituality" by the adherents of the new spirituality culture, show that the concept possesses an emic quality that should be more expressively apparent. Hence, I choose, in this thesis, to follow Sutcliffe's and Bowman's argument that spirituality 'can be understood as an emic repackaging of popular and vernacular religion to suit the peculiar conditions of industrial and post-industrial societies' (2000, 8). This definition agrees with Horie Norichika's constructionist attempt to place the use of the terms "spiritual" and "spirituality" within the specific Japanese context where, following particular social events that will be explored in the following sections, it functions as a sign of security in a social climate that considers religion as dangerous and thus enables people 'to hide and keep their intrinsic religiosity by positioning themselves closer to secularism' (Horie, forthcoming).

As for the issue of pinpointing an accurate description of what the Japanese popular and vernacular religion consists of, I think that Reader's and Tanabe's explanation of the term 'common religion' remains the best candidate.

In the Japanese case, this common religion involves acceptance of various spiritual entities, such as gods (*kami*) and buddhas, as well as ancestral spirits and spirits of powerful humans who have become

deities after death. It also includes the idea that such spirits can confer protection and success on the living and that petitioning for such benefits is a fundamental and highly ethical value. It also incorporates the various teachings expressed in the major scriptural traditions that have shaped Japanese religious history (*n.o.a* Buddhism and Shinto) and the liturgical systems and ritual practices that have (...) been formulated at the elite level of the temples and shrines and (...) among ordinary and not-so ordinary people (1998, 29-30).

Reader's and Tanabe's emphasis that at the heart of this Japanese common religion lies the practice of this-worldly benefits implies as they suggest that it is needs and inclinations and not previous commitment that dictate religious practice (*ibid*, 31). This explains the fact that, contrary to the Western surveys, the percentage of Japanese who believe in fortune-telling or the world of the dead has not changed much in the decades since the "subjective turn".

Table 1.1 shows the results obtained by a national Japanese survey by the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Centre, which included a question on religious beliefs. The participants (number in brackets below each year) were asked 'to choose among the following religions and faiths, the ones you believe in (*shūkyō to ka shinkō to ka ni kankei suru kotogara de, shinjite iru mono*)' (NHK-Hōsō Bunka Kenkyūsho, 2007, 135-136).

Table 1.1 NHK survey on Japanese religious beliefs

	1973 (4,243)	1978 (4,240)	1983 (4,064)	1988 (3,853)	1993 (3,814)	1998 (3,622)	2003 (3,319)
Buddhas	42%	45	44	45	44	39	39
Kami	33	37	39	36	35	32	31
Miracles	13	15	15	14	13	14	15
Lucky charms	14	16	16	14	16	14	15
The world of the dead	7	9	12	12	13	10	11
Fortune-telling	6	8	8	7	6	6	7
The Bible/other Sacred Doctrines	10	9	9	8	6	7	6
Do not believe in anything	30	24	23	26	24	30	26
Other/Don't know/no answer	6	6	5	6	8	7	9

Regarding the mainstreaming of the new spirituality culture, a 2003 nationwide survey conducted among 1,417 Japanese adults by a research group based at Kokugakuin University found that 25 per cent of those aged between 20 and 29 years old believe in the existence of individuals capable of seeing spirits and that 11.8 per cent of the same age group trust the effectiveness of hands-on healing (Ishii, 2007, 147). A more recent, 2007 survey among 4,000 students in 32 universities across Japan



revealed that 31.7 per cent would say ‘yes’ if they were asked to answer positively or negatively to the question ‘do you believe in the stories about spirits as narrated by Ehara Hiroyuki in the television show “the Fountain of Aura?”’ (Inoue, 2008b, 32). Finally, concerning the area where the majority of my fieldwork was spent, namely Tokyo, the results of a survey published in 2010 and claiming to reveal the “magical consciousness” (*jujutsu ishiki*) of the 724 randomly selected participants who live in the 23 districts of the Japanese capital confirmed that the greater role of mass media in large cities has significantly influenced the high percentage of magical consciousness among Tokyoites (Niitsu, 2010a, 65). For example, 55 per cent of the Tokyo sample was found to believe in the existence of a guardian spirit (*shugorei*) and a staggering 87 per cent said that they would follow their instinct (*chokkan*) / inspiration in the majority of cases (Niitsu, 2010b, 54-55)<sup>22</sup>.

Consequently what these surveys show for the Japanese case is that the new concepts of the new spirituality culture have, as expected, simply been added to other objects of belief that promise this-worldly benefits to those who seek them. This simple observation will be developed later in this thesis (see section 7.4), but it first necessitates a discussion on the process that allowed the spread of occultural terms into mainstream discourse.

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<sup>22</sup> Although this survey might have been a precious and timely source of information for my research, it presents one major flaw. As the authors stipulate in a footnote (Niitsu, 2010a, 69-71), the results of their survey cannot be compared to other surveys in Japan, because, contrary to them, they forced their participants to choose only one answer. Furthermore, the formulation of the choices in the Likert scale format of “agree” (*ariuru*), “slightly agree” (*dochiraka to ieba ariuru*), “slightly disagree” (*dochiraka to ieba arienai*), “disagree” (*arienai*), may be the reason why all percentages are higher than any other survey asking similar questions (people tending to choose “slightly agree”).

### **1.3. The mainstreaming of the new spirituality culture in Japanese society**

Two landmark periods signalled the mainstreaming of the Japanese occulture in recent history: the 1970s and the first half of the 1990s. The 1970s saw two consecutive oil shocks (in 1973 and 1978) which destabilized the global economy and strongly hit Japan's "miracle" rate of economic growth that had turned, in the span of less than fifteen years, a war-torn country into one of the world's largest economies, capable of hosting the Olympic Games in 1964. These oil shocks, according to Young, provoked a 'decline in ascetical ethos', that is 'a tendency toward less preoccupation with production and more willingness to attribute value to introspective, emotional, or non-rational activities' (1993, 243). Such a mentality change did not, of course, happen overnight: the Japanese had already started showing signs of refusal to continue their high production-consumption lifestyles dictated by the frenzied industrialization in which the country was embroiled.

The alliance with the United States which had allowed nuclear tests to be held near Japanese waters provoked pollution diseases, the occurrence of which was rendered even more frequent by the destruction of the environment that accompanied the country's rapid growth. Most significant here were the two outbreaks of mercury poisoning (so-called *Minamata* disease), in 1956 and 1968, which were due to industrial waste and which still afflict Japanese today<sup>23</sup>. Slowly, therefore, a fear of the uncontrollable, unpredictable consequences of man's excesses spread throughout society and is depicted, for example, in *Godzilla*, the mutated monster that became popular in films and comics from the mid-1950s onwards (Kaneko, 2006, 26). From

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<sup>23</sup> *The Japan Times*, 3 October 2006

there, only a small step separates the popularisation of all sorts of paranormal phenomena such as UFOs or ghost appearances that eventually led to the infatuation of the Japanese media in 1973 with spoon-bending specialist Uri Geller and with the movie 'The Exorcist' the following year. In fact, 1974, argues Ishii Kenji, marks a crucial year in the relationship between television and the occult: in that year alone, 40 different programmes were broadcast on themes such as 'telekinesis, psychic abilities, telepathy, departed spirits, female mediums, evil spirits, ghosts, exorcists, UFOs, aliens, supernatural senses, prophecies and photos of ghost apparitions (*shinrei shashin*)' (2008, 20-21).

Two other trends also contributed to this occult boom of the 1970s. Firstly, the subjective turn of the workforce who felt the reverberations of the oil shocks coincided with student protests across the country demonstrating against the Vietnam War and the myth of economic growth and social hierarchy (Yumiyama, 2004, 254). Yoshida Morio goes as far as to suggest, for example, that the popularity of Uri Geller had political underpinnings as it was followed in the same period by documentaries on the war in Israel (2006, 286). Politics and alternative beliefs, indeed, often go hand in hand and it is no surprise that 35 years later the Prime Minister of Japan attends presentations on *prana* healing.

Secondly, the beginning of the 1970s also saw the growing popularity of books announcing the end of the world such as the *Nosutoradamusu no dai yogen* (*Great Prophecies of Nostradamus*, 1973) and *Nihon chinbotsu* (*Japan Sinking*, 1973). These followed the previous decade's infatuation with works published by post-war, Buddhist New Religious Movements such as Sōka Gakkai International (S.G.I.) and Risshō Kōseikai that exhorted the Japanese to change and thus change the world with them. The

most prominent author among them was (and still is) Ikeda Daisaku, the head of S.G.I and author of a series of books entitled *Ningen kaimei (Human Revolution)*<sup>24</sup>.

Here an important parenthesis needs to be made concerning the concept of New Religious Movements. As Ian Reader suggests, Japanese NRMs are identifiable as ‘new’ because of their common emergence with modernity and in contrast with the thousand year-old tradition of Buddhism and the Shinto religion (2005, 87). Although we usually distinguish four major periods of their appearance (late nineteenth century, early twentieth century, immediate post-war years and 1978 onwards), these movements are all lay-centred and depend on the leadership of charismatic founders ‘whose authority emerges from their ability to attract followers through spiritual healing, revelation of new teachings, and serving as intermediaries between the lay membership and spiritual realms’ (ibid, 88). And here we find the two fundamentally common features between Japanese NRMs and occulture: the vitalist world-view which conceives the individual, society, nature and the universe as an integrated system moved by a single principle, and the spiritualist belief in the primacy of self-cultivation in order to affect the rest of the system and change one’s destiny (Hardacre, 1986, 11-21). These render the NRMs as one of the primary producers and consumers of the pool of alternative beliefs and practices that compose the Japanese occulture. Thus, the unrest of the 1970s provoked a new ‘boom in religious information’ (Inoue, 1994) dealing with these ideas and particularly with the methods meant to bring about the change promised by a fourth wave of new religious movements such as Shinnyoen, the Unification Church (*Tōittsu kyōkai*) or the Science of Happiness Association (*Kōfuku no kagaku*).

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<sup>24</sup> For a more detailed discussion on this subject, see Sumika Masayoshi (Sumika, 2006).

As Shimazono suggests, these new-new religions (as they are also called) were concerned with the loss of fulfilment in life and proposed counter-techniques such as meditation, ascetic training, bodywork, and psychotherapy (...) combined with the study of ancient mysticism, archaic religions, and myths and shamanistic rituals, and psychological theories (2004, 233). In April 1978, a fair on books on the spiritual world in India and Nepal (*Indo Nepāru seishin sekai no hon*) at a large store in central Tokyo launched the term ‘seishin sekai’ (the world of the spiritual) and, with it, a phenomenon which was comparable to, and reinforced by, the New Age Movement in the West. ‘Book after book by Edgar Cayce, Rudolf Steiner, Krishnamurti, Gurdjieff, and various Western gurus line the selves in Japanese translation’, noted Mark Mullins almost two decades ago (1992, 239). And Mullins continues by revealing that, not only was Shirley Maclaine’s *Out on a Limb* (first translated into Japanese in 1986) at the time in its 33rd printing, having sold some 200,000 copies, but Okawa Ryūhō, the 33-year old founder of the Science of Happiness Association, had written almost 150 books between 1986-1990 in which he narrated his communications with the spirit world. These had sold around four million copies (*ibid*, 239-240).

When Mullins was writing about the significant presence of the *seishin sekai*, Japanese society was experiencing a further period of unrest that I consider to be the second landmark in the mainstreaming of the Japanese occulture. Three particular events of the first half of the 1990s drove that process. The first was the burst of the bubble economy in 1991 that brought Japan’s first post-war economic crisis. Following five years (1986-1991) when the steep appreciation in asset prices led to ‘a collective mania spurred on by a contagious optimism that what is bought today can be sold tomorrow for a higher price’ (Kingston, 2004, 5), a crisis ensued in which the drop of

the Nikkei produced a loss of two trillion dollars, and land prices, which had been the main focus of the speculation of the previous years, decreased in some areas by 70 per cent. Jobs were lost and bankruptcies of banks, security firms, real estate companies and large retailers became daily news. The rise in the divorce and suicide rates was accompanied by the increase of the homeless population. ‘Japan was suddenly made to face the reality of a society divided into “haves” and “have nots”’ (ibid, 10).

As a consequence of the economic crisis, an “ice age” of employment reduced the number of high school and university graduates who could find “regular work” (*seishain*) and who could profit from the regular pay rises and life-time employment it promised; middle-class youths also began doing the irregular work that had so far been a working class activity. This shift created a media-launched moral panic that presented this “lost generation” as ‘young people who were (...) supposedly no longer willing to sacrifice for a job that demanded such dedication and emotional participation, that took the toll on body and soul that they had seen in their fathers, who brought Japan out of post-war recovery and into international prominence’ (Slater, 2010, 161). In turn, Japanese society criticised the increasing population of *freetā*<sup>25</sup> and attention was drawn to the new “social *maux*” such as the “parasite singles”<sup>26</sup> who are accused of lacking the will to take life risks, most notably in the popular book by Yamada Masahiro, *Kibō kakusa shakai* (*Hope-Disparate Society*, 2004). Ignoring the economic reasons for which such social changes occur, these criticisms also fail to indicate that

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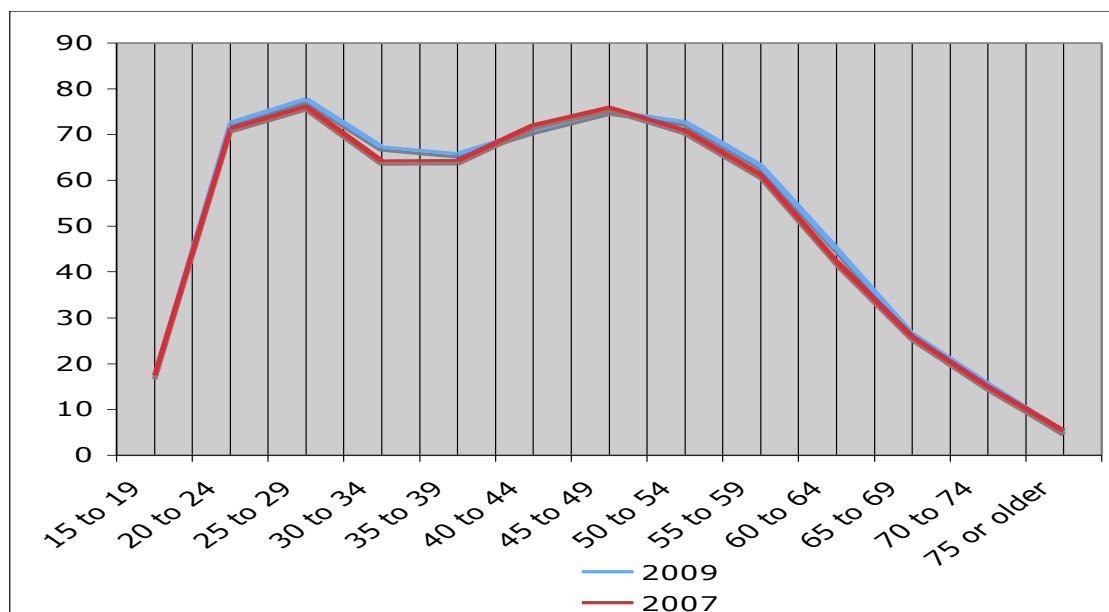
<sup>25</sup> A word made in Japan, by fusing the English word “free” with the German loan word for “worker” (arbeiter); it indicates those who are engaged in casual or part-time work and who are not students, regular employees or housewives (Whitelaw, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> This expression describes children’s continued dependence on parental support and the one-sided relationship where children sponge off their parents without causing them harm (Takahashi and Voss, 2000, 2).

the destabilization of employment opportunities mainly hit women (who, incidentally, make up the majority of parasite singles) and therefore reveals the continuing gender discrimination in the Japanese workplace.

As Beverly Bishop notes, post-war state policies encouraged the marginalization of women's paid labour to short tenure and lower paid positions which they were expected to leave in their twenties when they would have married a co-worker and used their savings to set up a home (2000, 94-95). As a result the female labour-force participation has been "traditionally" represented by the so-called M-shaped curve, which 'ascends to the mid-twenties, descends in the early thirties and swings steadily upward to the late forties, when it finally begins to decline' (Sugimoto, 2003, 155). The graph below compiled from data for the years 2007 and 2009<sup>27</sup>, shows that the shape of the curve has not changed.

Graph 1.1 Female labour force participation rates by age group



<sup>27</sup> from <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/roudou/index.htm>

Indeed, the economic crisis has exacerbated gender discrimination because women have been increasingly relegated to doing irregular work while keeping their “customary” role of “good wife, wise mother”. Consequently, recent research has shown that in comparison with other industrialized powers, Japan remains an exceptional outlier. ‘For every Japanese husband who does the shopping, cleans the bath, cooks or takes his children to nursery school, there are nine who leave the household and care of children to their wives (or mothers)’ (North, 2009, 41).

Four years after the collapse of the myth of permanent employment, in 1995 two other events shook the Japanese nation and reinforced the social instability that underlies the mainstreaming of the new spirituality culture. In January 1995 an earthquake of magnitude 7.3 killed more than 6,400 residents of the city of Kobe, injured several tens of thousands and razed most of the city to the ground. In March of the same year, the New Religious Movement, Aum Shinrikyō, perpetrated an act of domestic terrorism by releasing sarin gas in the Tokyo underground killing 12 people and injuring nearly a thousand. These two occurrences served as evidence that the Japanese did not live in the secure environment guaranteed by modern technology and government administration in which they had put their faith. And in this respect, the “Aum affair” caused the greatest socio-cultural shock by bringing to light several social issues, such as ‘incompetent police work, irresponsible media activity, a loss of credibility of religious scholars, dubious ethical training in the education system, [and] an increased level of violence under the influence of comics and video games’ (Matsudo, 2001, 164).

Most importantly for my analysis, following the Aum affair, all future religious issues were and are still measured on an ‘Aum incident-scale’ (Inoue, 2009, 103)



provoking a deep distrust towards institutional religion (see next section) and towards the term *shūkyō* (religion) itself and leading to the aforementioned use of the terms *supirichuaru/supirichuariti* (spiritual/spirituality) by Horie Norichika (forthcoming) instead. This rejection of institutional religion was accompanied by a significant differentiation and pluralisation of values that demonstrated a general dissociation from the mainstream of Japanese social consciousness. The main characteristics of the new value patterns were identified by Ulrich Möhwald as follows: avoidance of relationships that imply strong obligations, rejection of hierarchical social structures, conformity and respect for customs, weak social engagement, little interest in politics, strong sense of self-interest, orientation towards the hedonistic values of pleasure, amusement, and consumption, and a low degree of satisfaction with life and of self-esteem (2000, 66-67).

Subsequently, by the mid-nineties, all the myths of a stable, secure and homogeneous Japanese society had been distorted together with the destruction of the traditional pillars of “family” and “work”. The Japanese turned then, as Itō also notes (2004, 26), to the concepts of ‘healing’ (*hiiringu* or *iyashi*), ‘awareness’ (*kijuki*) and ‘self-searching’ (*jibun sagashi*) which had been used in books and seminars on “the world of the spiritual” and which became thereafter keywords characterizing Japanese society. And finally, “the world of the spiritual” was replaced by the shorter and mainstream concept of “the spiritual”.

#### **1.4. “The spiritual” in Japan today and Japanese studies of shamanism**

The first characteristic of “the spiritual” is precisely what distinguishes the Japanese phenomenon from its Western counterpart: a return to tradition and the

nationalistic revival that stemmed from it. Indeed, following the popularisation of regional histories (*fudoki*) in the 1950s (Nomura, 2006, 67), the 1970s saw a growing demand for works of historical fiction and for the research of Yanagita Kunio, Japan's first and foremost ethnographer, whose famous *Tōno monogatari* (*Legends of the Tōno Region*, 1912), for example, attempted to gather the oral tradition of common folk and show a religion particular to Japan, distinguished from both Western religions and the then State-imposed Shinto religious practices and beliefs (Isomae, 2005, 241). The result, as Shimazono emphasizes, was that, 'contrary to the U.S. and Europe, the new spirituality movements in Japan represent a restoration of traditional spirituality against the strong Western influences represented by modernization and international individualism' (1996b, 62). This return to tradition soon showed signs of nationalism and I will show later that many spiritual therapists make use of ideas that sound as if they have been taken directly from this body of pseudo-scientific books re-popularized in the 1980s and called *Nihonjinron* (*Discourse on Being Japanese*), which presented Japanese society 'as a *differentia specifica*, a society "uniquely unique" in the world' (Doak, 2007, 160).

A second characteristic of the world of the spiritual, shared this time with the New Age Movement, is the general concern from the 1970s onwards with healing and growth. Understandably, the subjective turn, and the need for change felt by individuals of industrialized societies called for techniques for knowing oneself and subsequently bettering oneself. Therefore the 1980s saw a tremendous increase in the popularity of fortune-telling salons with entire buildings turned over to divination malls: tarot reading,

Western astrology (*sensei jyutsu*), Four Pillar Astrology (*shichū suimei*)<sup>28</sup>, hand-reading, name fortune-telling (*seimei handan*)<sup>29</sup>, blood-type fortune-reading, and so on. The number of publications on fortune-telling multiplied tenfold between the 1960s and the 1990s and a survey in 1990 found that 64 per cent of high school girls had visited a fortune-teller at least once (Taneda, 1999, 185, 198). By the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the Human Potential Movement (and its theoretical wing, Transpersonal Psychology) had arrived on Japanese soil from the United States. The basic goal of the Human Potential Movement, as Hanegraaff explains, is ‘to restore the human being to his/her original wholeness and integration, and thus enable him/her to live a full and meaningful life’ (1996, 49). This in practice meant the appearance of self-development (*jiko keihatsu*) seminars, workshops and books, teaching techniques often with a spiritual aspect, meant to reduce stress, bring happiness, and improve family and love relationships or business. That is when, according to Inken Prohl, we saw the rise of ‘spiritual capitalism’ whose most prominent figure, particularly during the mid-1990s, was consulting firm owner and author Funai Yukio, who used concepts from “the world of the spiritual” such as *ki*, vibrations (*shindō*), and the need for self-transformation (*jiko henshin*) to attract Japanese from all backgrounds, businessmen, students and housewives alike (2007, 364-365).

This spiritual capitalism tends to “use” the negative effects of the “Aum affair”. As mentioned in the previous section, the Japanese seem to have “turned their back on religion” due to the Aum Shinrikyo attack: a 1999 survey asking ‘what happened to your ideas on religion after the Aum incident?’ revealed that 54.9 per cent of

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<sup>28</sup> A Chinese divination technique based on the person’s time and date of birth.

<sup>29</sup> A divination technique based on the Chinese characters used to write one’s name.

respondents selected the ‘it worsened a lot’ option (Inoue, 1999, 33). Ben Dorman, in his study of one of the media figures of the post-Aum era, Hosoki Kazuko, notes, however, how Japanese, while appearing ‘to display an increasing aversion to affiliation with a religious group, (...) accept that there is some spiritual value in concepts such as *kami* and buddhas’ (2007, 45). Indeed, it is important to mention that the term ‘religion’ in the last decade has come to mean “religious organisations” as those have been represented in the cases of mass-suicide, kidnapping and financial fraud which have been discovered from the late 1980s.<sup>30</sup> Dorman therefore shows how famous personalities of “the spiritual” such as Hosoki, who holds the 2006 Guinness World Record as the best-selling author of fortune-telling books, having sold 34 million copies of her 81 publications, managed to use the trend of longing for a return to “original” Japanese tradition and an aversion towards religious movements, to extract concepts such as “ancestor worship” (*senzo kuyō*) from their meaningful religious milieu and present them ‘as a common sense that should be perfectly natural to the Japanese people’ (ibid, 34). These concepts then find a new meaning in the “therapy culture” that has been so important in Japan since the mid-1990s and which has been identified by some as today’s ‘alternative to religion’ (Koike, 2007a, v).

Koike Yasushi, describes this phenomenon of therapy-culture as the ‘psychologization’ (*shinrishugika*) of a society (ibid, 1) which has become the subject today of a popularisation of counselling, group therapy, 12-steps therapy, PTSD therapy, feminist therapy, self-development seminars and workshops, industrial psychology, and so on. In fact, therapy-culture and the new spirituality culture are two

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<sup>30</sup> The recent book, *Shūkyō jiken no uchigawa (Inside Religious Incidents)*, Fujita, [2008] by journalist Fujita Shōichi presents a very informative account of different incidents that led to the Aum affair.

sides of the same coin argues Shimazono (2002, 17), since they have both contributed to bringing “the spiritual” to the forefront of Japanese needs. It all started of course with the need for spiritual care for the survivors of the Kobe earthquake and for spiritual education for the apostates of Aum Shinrikyō; thereafter, by the beginning of the new millennium, “the spiritual” and “spirituality” had become buzzwords for everything meta-empirical (borrowing the concept from Hanegraaf’s definition of spirituality). One figure then managed to blend perfectly therapy culture and the new spirituality culture, and become the model for many of the spiritual therapists discussed in this thesis: self-proclaimed “spiritual counsellor”, Ehara Hiroyuki, whose book *Kōun hikiyoseru supirichuaru bukku* (*A Spiritual Book for Attracting Good Luck*) (2001) immediately became a 600,000 copy best-seller (Shimazono, 2006). Ehara used the existing concerns of Japanese society about spiritual care and counselling to introduce to the general public previously occult concepts such as ‘aura’ and ‘past-life’ drawn directly from Western spiritualism<sup>31</sup>. Thus, in the last decade, an “Ehara boom” has been observed and with it a boom in professional therapists, such as Mr Suzuki, introduced at the beginning of this chapter. Of course, not all of them practice the same techniques or bear the same professional appellations. As I shall show in detail in chapter 3, there is actually a great diversity of spiritual therapists and therapies in Japan.

The surge of such services appealing to the “spirituality” of the individual has of course an important financial dimension that has impelled sociologist of religion, Sakurai Yoshihide’s fierce attack on the spiritual business, a concept that I briefly introduced in section 1.1. The issue, however, is that neither Sakurai nor any other

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<sup>31</sup> In Japanese, this spiritualism was originally called *shinreishugi* (神霊主義) to distinguish it from “spiritualism” as the opposite of “materialism”, in which case a different character is used: *shinreishugi* (心霊主義). This last term has, in recent years, come however to encompass both meanings.

researcher has so far undertaken a systematic study of today's Japanese spiritual therapists. Arguably the subject is relatively new, but I would like to suggest here that another field of research in Japan also overshadowed it: shamanism. Considering the relevance to my investigation of many theoretical frameworks originally developed to explain shamanistic practices in Japan, I prefer to introduce these concepts when deemed necessary. Here, however, I shall briefly discuss the particularities of this body of studies in Japan.

Fiona Bowie identifies four broad trends among writers on shamanism (2006, 191-197): those like Mircea Eliade (1964), Ioan M. Lewis (1989), Joan Halifax (1982) and Piers Vitebsky (2001) for whom shamanism refers to a variety of religious practices and ecstatic behaviour around the world; those who, often belonging to the first category as well, such as Joan Halifax and Michael J. Winkelman (Winkelman, 2004), trace the phenomenon to humanity's prehistory, often calling it the original form of religion; in contrast, there are those such as Åke Hulthkrantz (1978) and S.M. Shirokogoroff (1966), who warn of the danger of applying a term reserved for a circumpolar regional phenomenon to any ecstatic behaviour; and those, such as Carlos Castaneda (1968) and Michael Harner (1980), who have recently promoted the concept of neo-shamanism with reference to the New Age belief that anyone with appropriate training can become a shaman. A discussion of shamanism in Japan automatically locates the researcher in Bowie's first category, if not also in the second one. In fact, the term 'shamanism' was introduced into Japanese scholarly circles (as *shāmanizumu*) by religious studies researcher, Hori Ichirō<sup>32</sup>, who, strongly influenced by Mircea Eliade's

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<sup>32</sup> Sasaki Kōkan notes that it was Hori's 1972 publication entitled *Nihon no shāmanizumu* (*Shamanism in Japan*) that first used the foreign appellation (Sasaki, 1984, 136).

ideas during his visit to Chicago University, ended up translating Eliade's writings into Japanese and shaped Japanese research in the field for decades to come<sup>33</sup>. Hori's authority in Japanese ethnography was already recognized by his status as the successor of Yanagita Kunio<sup>34</sup>. Hence, Hori sought to combine Yanagita's belief in a unique, fundamental and all-pervasive Japanese religiosity with Eliade's idea of shamanism as a universally occurring primitive religious ecstatic phenomenon. However, he soon realized that these Japanese specialists described in Yanagita's works as *kuchiyose miko* (Yanagita, 1963, 9, 223, 230-231) were mediums specializing in summoning a spirit and having it speak through them to third persons (Knecht, 2004b, 180). This therefore contradicted Eliade's emphasis on ecstasy. Hori thus concluded that the Japanese shamanesses were 'a corrupt vestige of authentic shamanism' (1975, 279), which, he claims, existed in Japan in the past but had disappeared in the modern period due to political and social change (1968, 203).

Carmen Blacker, in her seminal work *The Catalpa Bow* (1999) relying on both Yanagita's and Hori's arguments, calls the *kuchiyose miko* a shamanic medium and approves of the validity of historical continuity from 'the ancient sibyl' to her apparent present-day survivals. Among these survivals Blacker includes the founders of the new religions who she claims come closest to the original Japanese shaman (1999, 128-129). On publishing *The Catalpa Bow*, Blacker was praised for her success in unifying a considerable amount of previously unrelated material, which revealed the shamanistic aspects of Japanese religion (Earhart, 1976, 182). Yet criticism of Yanagita's ideas had

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<sup>33</sup> Hori reports that in 1958 when Eliade came to Japan to attend an international conference on religious studies, Hori travelled with him to the north of the country to show him the *itako*, the type of shaman I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>34</sup> Hori Ichirō was also Yanagita's son-in-law.

already emerged in the Japanese academic world before the publication of Blacker's work, and was soon summarized in 1980 in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*. In this short survey, Mori Kōichi noted that Yanagita's identification with traditional Japanese values derived mainly from the National Learning<sup>35</sup> influence which he had received through his father and which had led him, not only to distinguish and attach greater importance to what he considered to be traditional Japanese values from "foreign ways", represented mainly by Confucianism and Buddhism, but also to conclude that the primitive pattern of the Japanese common religion consists of worship of ancestral spirits (Mori, 1980, 86, 98). This latter, according to Yanagita, is a kind of religious communication between the souls of the ancestors and their descendants (1963, 15, 560-561). Blacker's study of shamanic practices in Japan expresses therefore this basic idea of a primitive, nationally shared, fundamental Japanese religious character, which she discovered in every magico-religious practice surveyed. Rotermond recently showed, however, that the concepts of 'immortality of the soul' and the solicitude for the soul/mind of the dead were politico-religious propaganda created by the Meiji government (1868-1912) in its efforts to make of Shinto, a "religion" comparable to, and thus in competition with, the newly authorized religion of Christianity (Rotermond, 2004, 378).

Another criticism of Carmen Blacker arose from the Preface to the third edition of her book, where she claims that 'no New Age movement seems to have arisen in Japan' (1999, 5), an argument that ignores the reality described earlier in this chapter. Helen Hardacre has warned against such hasty conclusions and noted 'that Japanese

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<sup>35</sup> National Learning or *kokugaku* (国学) was a late eighteenth century intellectual movement focusing on the study of Japanese classic literature and thought, and aimed at defining Japan as a unique social and cultural identity, the 'prehistory of Japanese nationness' (Burns, 2003, 9).



shamanism is undergoing transformation rather than extinction, and that alongside the relentless rationalization and secularization of publicised representations of Japan, the quest to anchor shifting material fortunes in an unseen, unchanging world of unassailable and absolute meanings is equally and increasingly strong' (1996, 218). Nevertheless, the determination to record the vestiges of "an original" Japanese shamanism continued after the *Catalpa Bow*. In 1977, Sakurai Tokutarō, another prominent figure in this field published his second and final volume of *Nihon no shāmanizumu* (*Japanese Shamanism*, 1977) and, after a long survey throughout Japan, concluded that the shamanic practitioners operating at the periphery of the country, namely in the north-eastern region (Tōhoku) and in the southern islands of Okinawa, are the ones still bearing the features of the "original Japanese shaman". Thus, the majority of studies since then have dealt exclusively with these two regions<sup>36</sup>, to the extent that today, for example, as reported by fellow Japanese doctoral students, it would be very difficult for an outsider to find a *yuta* (local Okinawan denomination for a shaman) willing to become the subject of research yet again. Indeed, in the last decade, despite a return to local appellations in order to avoid the controversies surrounding the use of the term "shaman" and to develop a better understanding of regionally diverging customs and practices<sup>37</sup>, the study of shamanistic magico-religious professionals in Japan seems to have run out of steam; most of the senior generation of researchers have moved out of the field altogether while a few new specialists have focused on comparative studies of shamanism in Japan with that in Mongolia, Korea or China.

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<sup>36</sup> See Sasaki (1984) and Ōhashi (1998) on Okinawa, Kanda (1987), Kawamura (1991) and Hirayama (2005) on Tōhoku, and Ikegami (1999) for both of these regions.

<sup>37</sup> Anne Bouchy notes that more than 70 names have been recorded (2001, 89).

## **1.5. Objective and structure of the thesis**

In this chapter I have introduced the concept of occulture in order to explain first the connection between various beliefs and practices that answer to neither scientific reason nor established religious doctrines, and second to discuss the rising popularity of a new spirituality culture that presents common features around the globe, and which in its Japanese version, has been influenced by events occurring during two landmark periods: the 1970s and the first half of the 1990s. I have shown that the characteristic return to tradition that is particular to this Japanese new spirituality culture, coupled with the infatuation with all types of healing and growth that can be found in all parts of the world today, has provoked the appearance in this last decade of a new type of therapist. This “spiritual therapist”, who preaches ‘spirituality but not religion’ and whose business practices have recently attracted ill-informed criticism, formed the focus of my fieldwork and I believe that this study will breathe new air into research on magico-religious practitioners in Japan.

Basing my rationale on Steve Bruce’s argument that ‘the New Age is important not for the changes it will bring, but for the changes it epitomises’ (2000, 234), my critical analysis will assume that the popularity of the spiritual therapy phenomenon as it is manifested through the growing independent “spiritual business” reflects changes in the therapeutic experiences which contemporary Japanese people are seeking and in the types of everyday ideologies they prefer to adhere to; and ultimately my analysis is designed to reveal the social trends and issues these practitioners and users of spiritual therapy are facing in present day Japan.

The main research question is therefore the following: Is the spiritual business just another money-making method used by individuals to profit from the latest Japanese

consumerist fashion, or does its popularity express deeper changes in contemporary Japanese therapeutic, ideological and social needs? The best way to start answering this question is to present the main actors of the spiritual business: the spiritual therapists. Hence, Chapters 2 and 3 aim at introducing these practitioners through an extensive discussion of my methodology and a summary of the interview data describing the identity, character and background of the spiritual therapists, including what they are doing and for whom. Next, Chapter 4 will demonstrate the complexities of the spiritual business by following the path of spiritual therapists from learning their craft, to establishing a salon and to practising several techniques. The analysis will then move in Chapter 5 to my experience of sample spiritual therapies in order to understand how these techniques may appeal to Japanese models of illness/calamity aetiology. After this purely experiential account of spiritual therapy, Chapter 6 will discuss the ideological characteristics of the practice of spiritual therapy and how these reflect changes in the beliefs and uses of popular cosmologies by Japanese people. Finally, the analysis will conclude with the argument that the growth of the spiritual business accounts for recent media-launched social trends, socio-economic difficulties, surviving gender discrimination practices and changing methods of socialization and the sense of self in contemporary Japan. The final chapter will conclude my analysis by presenting a full picture of the phenomenon and by attempting to summarize my findings in terms of a conceptual model that shows the connection between the different aspects of the popularisation of spiritual therapy.

## **Chapter 2: On Spiritual Trails**

Being in the field was a necessary part of my work from the early stages of my study of the spiritual therapists of contemporary Japan. And from the beginning, all of the three major components of fieldwork, namely participant observation, interviewing and archival research, were used to gather as much information as possible within a limited span of time. But, as Harry F. Wolcott cautions, ‘there is no way anyone can prepare another person for all the vagaries of fieldwork, any more than one can train or prepare another for the vagaries of life’ (2005, 86). In my case, those vagaries started from the very beginning, and considerable effort was invested into keeping my original interest while combining constant literature review, discussions with local researchers and direct observations in order to identify the appropriate subjects to be interviewed, the as yet un-investigated areas and the most appropriate approach to data collection. The first section of this chapter will show how a preliminary fieldwork trip to Japan allowed me to solve an early issue relating to a lack of understanding of what kind of practitioners I was really planning to study. The second section will focus on the mainly internet-based methods I adopted in order to identify and contact my informants, and on the practicalities of interviewing them.

Subsequently, I will discuss two particular advantages which are based on my personal and academic background and which played a key role in fostering opportunities to interview practitioners who had not been the subject of research before. The significance of using this beneficial “baggage” comes, however, with many responsibilities: in the last section of this chapter I will introduce the precautions dictated by my concern to protect both my integrity as a researcher and the subjects of

my research. What I hope to achieve in this chapter is to provide a feeling as close as possible to the reality of my fieldwork activities, while the next chapter will consist of a preliminary analysis of my interviews with the 68 spiritual therapists. I hope therefore that, on reaching the concluding part of Chapter 3, in which I demonstrate the appropriateness of my methodology, the reader will have a very good idea of the background of the practitioners, of the format and function of their activities and on how I obtained information from them. I will then move on to the main part of my argument and show how the popularity of these contemporary Japanese spiritual therapists today expresses more general socio-economic, therapeutic and ideological concerns of Japanese society as a whole.

## **2.1. From shamans to *reinōsha*.**

As mentioned earlier, my concern to investigate what the recent popularity of spiritual therapists can tell us about contemporary Japanese society stemmed from an original interest in medical anthropological studies of Japanese shamanistic practices. My reading of a four-page article published in *Current Anthropology* by Nishimura Kho, who claimed to have found a connection between the declining occurrence of mental disorders (particularly schizophrenia) and the thriving of shamans in the North-eastern regions of Honshū island (1987), had sparked the idea that, if such practitioners were still popular in Japan today, their socio-medical role might be worthy of further study. My research started therefore with the assumption that the social role of contemporary Japanese shamanistic practitioners, where deemed significant, contributed to the health and well-being of Japanese society, and I was intent on looking for explanations as to why this might be true. To accomplish that, however, I needed to identify the practitioners said to have such a role. Subsequent reviews of the literature revealed more recent arguments for the socio-medical role of the shamanic rituals conducted by the *yuta* (female shamans of Okinawa) (Allen, 2002b ; 2002a ; Allen, Naka and Ishizu, 2004) and the importance for clinical psychologists of being aware of the *yuta* cosmology and illness aetiology and being able to take a culturally sensitive approach to their treatment of local patients (Shimoji et al., 1998 ; Shimoji and Miyakawa, 2000). Additionally, Sakurai Tokutarō, the most respected ethnographer of shamanism in Japan in the second half of the twentieth century, was calling for more research in this area in one of his most recent publications, noting that ‘it is often true that the shamanistic séance is unscientific or anachronistic, but, in reality, most people receive a certain mental relief from attending these practices, so we should continue looking into that

field for the reason that, if for us the shaman is only a kind of exorcist, for those who consult him or her, on the contrary, the shaman is a counsellor, a healer' (2000, 39).

However, the trail stopped with these studies undertaken mostly in Okinawa prefecture where, as previously indicated, the majority of studies on shamanism in Japan have traditionally been focussed. I had, therefore, to find out more about the current state of research in this area, and, thus, I undertook a preliminary fieldwork trip between 24 March and 12 April 2008 during which I had arranged to meet several local researchers (see Appendix 3). This early experience of the field turned out to be an important stepping-stone in the process of formulating my research focus. While my meeting with established researchers in the field of shamanism in Japan (Takamatsu, Kanda, Kawamura, Sasaki and Ikegami) and East Asia (Choe and Sasaki) revealed a certain exhaustion of local studies and the previously noted tendency to move towards comparative research with Korean, Chinese and Mongolian cases, my meeting with the staff of Nanzan University, and particularly Ben Dorman, hinted at the need to investigate the growing role of the internet in the proliferation of contemporary forms of spiritual healing. Additionally, Kanda Yoriko, who has published extensively on the shamans of the Tōhoku region discussed the recent surge of shamanistic activities due to the popularisation of television figures such as Hosoki Kazuko and Ehara Hiroyuki to whom I referred in Chapter 1. The first time I really understood the extent to which this new spirituality culture had spread into the daily lives of the Japanese was on the occasion when Inoue Nobutaka, prominent scholar of new religious movements in Japan, showed me the results of his survey among 4,306 students selected out of 35 Japanese universities, which suggested that 51 per cent of his sample were visiting internet websites offering divination services every day (2008a). But where was I to

find these newly developing types of shamanistic practitioners and, more importantly, can we still talk of shamans when discussing individuals such as Ehara Hiroyuki?

Anne Bouchy had already drawn attention to the appearance of the ‘urban’ shamans, who had come down from the mountains to the urban centres, where, in their own words, ‘problems exist and we need to be there for those suffering’ (2001, 104). The idea of making Tokyo one of the locations of my fieldwork was thus first suggested by Sasaki Shin’ichi as an interesting and original point of comparison, which I could then contrast with areas such as the north of Miyazaki prefecture where a more “traditional type” of shamanistic practitioner could be found and to whom Watanabe Kazuhiro, former postgraduate student at Kagoshima University had agreed to introduce me. However, before addressing the issue of how to contact the urban shamans of Tokyo, the problem of definition still persisted. I knew that, as Peter Knecht rightly points out, in recent years, scholars in Japan had returned to the use of vernacular terms to identify these practitioners (2004a, 676). In fact, the most common term used in academic publications had come to be *fusha* (巫者), which both Bouchy (2001, 90) and Knecht (2004a, 674) translated as ‘medium’, thereby emphasizing the oracle-transmitting ability which is common among all these individuals. Both shaman (*shāman* in Japanese pronunciation) and *fusha* are however academic terms hardly ever heard in everyday conversation. In my discussion with Clarke Chilson at Nanzan University, another term was suggested as more common and often found in the yellow pages: that of *kitōshi* (祈祷師, ritual master) which Bouchy considers as the official appellation that distinguishes these individuals from “higher” types of religious practitioners such as the Buddhist monks and Shinto priests, and also from “lower” types of professions such as fortune-telling, astrology or faith healing (2001, 103). Yet,



in his functional definition of the shaman, Ikegami Yoshimasa includes the roles of therapist, ritual holder, prophet and diviner among the activities a *fusha* may conduct as a result of his ability to communicate with a spiritual entity (*reiteki sonzai*) (2008, 3). But, most importantly, Ikegami noted in the script of a recent lecture, which he handed to me in April 2008, that in recent years it is the name “reinōsha” (霊能者, lit. a person with spiritual abilities) that has come to be usually associated with all these individuals in popular discourse (ibid). And this is where I was able to find my first workable terminology, although two issues require further elaboration.

Firstly, I believe that the use of the term *reinōsha* demonstrates the solution that popular culture has given to the research question in which studies of shamanism in Japan have been entangled since the beginning: ultimately it is not about who is, or who is not, a shaman, but rather whether or not a shamanistic feature is present in the practices of the priests, monks, fortune-tellers, healers etc. (Sasaki, 2006, 459). Popular discourse therefore had identified as this fundamental shamanistic feature some sort of ability to communicate with a world of spiritual entities and I decided that this should therefore be the key characteristic to look for among the websites, inventories and stories narrated from friends and colleagues in Tokyo.

Secondly, the suspicious (*ikagawashii*) nature, which Ikegami argues to have recently been attached to the term *reinōsha* (2008, 7), attests to the existence of a newer terminology, temporarily devoid of suspicion that I later came to identify as being the word “spiritual”. Indeed, this word often prefixed other terms, such as “counsellor”, “advisor”, “healer” or “therapist”. A detailed discussion of the term “spiritual” and the characteristics to which it refers will be provided in more detail in Chapter 6. However, for the moment, the above observation suggests the “fluidity” of the relationship

between such practitioners and Japanese society. As, Ikegami suggests, today's magico-religious practitioners have become mobile on an X-Y axis (ibid, 8-9). On the X pole are those who are separated from reality by their own individual spiritual experiences, such as being able to hear the voices of the gods or see the realm of the dead. Their character is "original" and thus, the danger of being thought of as mad by the community is greater. However, their influence on the people around them is also strong. On the Y pole are those who are close to and reach a compromise with the community. Although their individual spiritual experiences may involve possession by spirits or gods, they basically express themselves in a language shared by the community to which they belong. Even their glossolalia uttered in altered states of consciousness corresponds to a fixed form recognized by the community. The closer to the pole Y the *reinōsha* finds him/herself, however, the weaker their influence over the surrounding community, because of the diminished novel character of their practice.

Following these preliminary deliberations and my exploratory visit in March-April 2008, I was convinced that I possessed sufficient theoretical background to identify those socio-medical practitioners whom I was to study. I therefore returned to Japan in the summer of 2008 to observe the *itako* (see section 1.1) during the festival of Mount Osore on 20-24 July, and then focussed my efforts in Tokyo where I anticipated that it would be more difficult to locate my subjects of research. At the time, I was still planning to follow a comparative path between the *itako* whom I placed on the Y pole of Ikegami's axis, being probably the most famous Japanese "shamans" inside and outside academia, the *ogamiya* (local denomination for the shamanistic practitioners) of Miyazaki prefecture, who, according to Mr Watanabe, could be located somewhere in the middle of the axis, and the *reinōsha* of Tokyo whom I saw as representatives of pole

X. Several circumstances however led to a change of plans. The most significant was my first meeting with Mr Suzuki, the spiritual advisor in Shinjuku who I immediately realized was the new type of shamanistic practitioner about whom I had been hearing: an individual practising on the margins of society (pole X), meeting clients at a coffee shop near his workplace, after or before his regular work hours, handing out business cards containing only his first name, the electronic address of his mobile phone and the word ‘spiritual advisor’. As is often the case in urban settings (Bouchy, 2001, 100), Mr Suzuki was introduced to me through a network of acquaintances and he seemed to be really popular: already three of my friends had been to see him in the span of one month and they reported that friends of their friends had to wait for several months to receive an appointment. In fact, I, too, waited for two months before I could finally meet him in October 2008.

Here, I knew I had found something new. Ikegami Yoshimasa, who had by then agreed to be my supervisor during the 14-month fieldwork period which had just begun, agreed that rather than the *itako*, *ogamiya* and *yuta* whom he (Ikegami, 1999) and others had studied extensively, an investigation into the practices of *reinōsha* such as Mr Suzuki would be extremely interesting and original. In this regard and from the perspective of studies of Japanese shamanism, my focus would be on what could best be termed ‘neo-shamanism’ (Atkinson, 1992, 322). Moreover, within the field of study of the new spirituality culture in Japan, most prominently discussed in the work of Shimazono Susumu (see previous chapter), my research would be the first to examine the newly emerging and prolific actors of this culture, the “sons” and “daughters” of the Ehara boom. In either case, I was leaving the domain of “traditional” shamanism and that of Carmen Blacker, and entering the world of occulture and alternative therapy.

Finally, further examination of the relevant literature convinced me that I should abandon the comparative aspect of my project. The arguments developed in Shiotsuki Ryōko's doctoral thesis (2003) (which was lent to me by Ikegami Yoshimasa), revealed that the *yuta*, the traditional Japanese shamanistic practitioners *par excellence*, under the influence of the internet and the globalising new spirituality culture, had not only started using a vocabulary characteristic of “the world of the spiritual” phenomenon in Japan, such as ‘*hadō*’ (wave motions) and ‘DNA’ (Shiotsuki, 1999), but had also been visited by fans outside their local community, who had met on the internet and organised *yuta*-tours (Shiotsuki and Satō, 2003 ; Shiotsuki, 2004). Hence, it seemed that my abstract identification of a “traditional” shaman, which I could then compare with a neo-shaman or urban shaman, would constitute an artificial comparison, divorced from reality. My location of different types of shamanistic practitioners on Ikegami's axis seemed to be arbitrary and frozen in time, while the rapid transformation provoked by Ehara Hiroyuki's popularity had in fact increased the “fluidity” of the *reinōsha* on that axis. I needed to delve into the heart of this new spiritual phenomenon in Tokyo and seek out those who had inspired this regeneration of interest in traditional shamanism in Japan.

## **2.2. Finding and contacting spiritual therapists**

The next step required an inductive approach. Indeed, considering the lack of studies in this field, I first had to investigate who these *reinōsha* in Tokyo are, what they are doing and how and why they are doing it, before I would be able to formulate any thoughts about the significance of their social role. I had, in fact, predicted that a grounded theory

approach in qualitative research would fit perfectly my objective of ‘understanding the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants’ (Bryman, 2004, 266). My sampling was therefore theoretical: it was based on the hypothesis that the new wave of shamanistic practitioners for which I was looking held in common the claim of possession or a connection with a meta-empirical world, a “spiritual world”, that allowed them to conduct one or several types of counselling and/or therapy(ies). “*Supirichuaru*” (spiritual) and “*reinō*” (霊能, spiritual power/ability) became therefore the two keywords in my search for informants throughout my fieldwork, and hereafter I describe the way I contacted and interviewed these practitioners.

As suggested by Ben Dorman, the internet was, and remains, the most important source of information on alternative therapies in Japan today. The majority (42) of those whom I now call spiritual therapists were, in fact, found through two web portals for spiritual business professionals: [www.teddyangel.com](http://www.teddyangel.com) and <http://www.alkjapan.net/healing/tokyo.htm>. Teddyangel<sup>38</sup> was first visited on 20 March 2009 and listed at the time 229 practitioners in the Tokyo area, to which 18 were added on 21 May 2009. The rest appeared as follows: Hokkaidō, 42, Tōhoku, 31, Koshinetsu, 14, Hokuriku, 19, North Kantō, 22, Saitama, 37, Chiba, 30, Kanagawa-Izu, 72, Chūbu-Tōkai, 65, Kansai, 54, Ōsaka-city, 74, Chūgoku, 37, Shikoku, 12, Kyūshū, 46, and Okinawa, six. This made an approximate total of 800 spiritual healers (some internet links are dead) without counting the list of nearly 190 salons which appear in the category of healers willing to travel nationwide or work only over the phone.

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<sup>38</sup> “Teddy” is the nickname of the owner of the website and “angel” is a concept often used by spiritual therapists.

Attesting to their popularity, we can therefore estimate that there are more than 1000 spiritual healers listed on *teddyangel.com*. Between 20 March 2009 and 30 July 2009, 94 of those listed in the Tokyo area were contacted by e-mail<sup>39</sup>. The second web portal was first visited on 5 August 2009 and listed at the time 45 salons, of which 21 were contacted on the same day by the same means as before. The response rate from both websites was generally good. From the first portal, I eventually interviewed 34 practitioners, and from the second, 8 therapists agreed to answer my questions.

The initial selection process was relatively simple: as stated above any reference to the conduct of sessions using an ability to communicate with transcendental beings, whether these were spirits of ancestors, angels<sup>40</sup>, fairies<sup>41</sup>, the Higher Self, gods (*kami*), the universe and so on, automatically qualified the practitioner as a prospective subject of research. However, the more therapists I met, the more it became obvious that such claims often coexisted with the practice of “energy work”, techniques which were believed to transfer energy into, or balance, the energy of the client’s body. For the spiritual therapists, therefore, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, the passive power to see, hear or feel meta-empirical occurrences often implied the active power of healing/therapy that accompanied this contact with the “other world”. Thus, sometimes it became impossible to isolate the “passive” practitioners from the “active”

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<sup>39</sup> The number of requests and dates on which they were sent are as follows: five (20 March), seven (5 April), seven (9 April), nine (13 April), 13 (17 April), eight (3 May), four (4 May), seven (5 May), 32 (5 June) and two (30 July).

<sup>40</sup> *The Dictionary of Psychic and Spiritual Science* defines angel (*tenshi*) as second in rank to the gods (*kami*). ‘In Japan they can be thought of as corresponding to the *yaoyorozu ōkami* (the myriad deities of Shinto)’ (Harukawa, 2009, 230).

<sup>41</sup> Fairies (*yōsei*) are pictured in the same form as in the West: a woman-like insect. Harukawa provides a picture of what is believed in Japanese occulture to be a fairy residing in the Setagaya district of Tokyo in 1947 (2009, 331).

ones and additional keywords such as “healing”, or “hypnotherapy”, for example, had to be added to the list of techniques to search for in a therapist’s web page. Eventually I ended up working by a process of elimination and ignoring only salons which specialized in some type of bodywork (e.g. massage, acupuncture, or chiropractic treatment), fortune-telling (e.g. tarot reading, I-ching, feng-shui) or art healing (e.g. voice healing, paint healing). I also avoided foreign therapists, web pages of organisations and, of course, the practitioners who had already declared on their internet website that they were not available for interview.

While the second online inventory did not provide a short description for every therapy salon (thus all of the 45 pages were visited and scanned for the above requirements), the first website, after the link to the salon’s homepage, included a brief advertisement from the owner. Hence, I was able to eliminate some web pages before I visited them. I have copied below in figure 2.1 the section (17 out of the 229) that I checked on 3 May 2009 on the *teddyangel* inventory and I add my notes for each entry. The keywords which were used to decide whether to open the page or not, are marked in bold and translated in the next column. In total, eight practitioners were contacted that day and only one response (negative) was returned. Three web links were not working at the time of the visit, the e-mail addresses provided on two homepages were invalid, one therapist had temporarily closed her salon and the sessions advertised by the three remaining practitioners were deemed to be outside the scope of this research.

Figure 2.1 Sample section of the *teddyangel* inventory

	Name of Salon	Status
123	Healing Space Broom ブルーム (目黒区) ヴォイスヒーリングを中心とするセッションを行っています	(not relevant) <i>voice healing</i>
124	<a href="#">金のうさぎセラピールーム (小金井市)</a>	(e-mail sent)

	ヒプノセラピー (前世療法) を通じて貴女を癒します	<i>hypnotherapy, past life therapy</i>
125	心とからだを癒す COCOKARA (東京) ヒーリングでは満足できないあなたに・・・	(link not working)
126	angel-light (東京・横浜) スピリチュアルヒーリング、リーディング	(e-mail sent) <i>spiritual healing</i>
127	ヒーリングるーむ Harmony (東京) エナジー・ヒーリングクレヤボヤンスリーディング、リフレクソロジー	(e-mail sent) <i>energy healing</i>
128	<a href="#">ナウミスペース (東京)</a> ヒーリングデザイナー相邑美佐江さんのHP	(e-mail sent) <i>Healing</i>
129	アルティーワールド・ヒーリングルーム (五反田) 前世療法・カウンセリング・言霊ワーク等。電話セッションもあり	(therapist on holiday) <i>past-life therapy, counselling</i>
130	アモール エスペランザ (八王子市) 「今を生きる」がモットーの精神世界系カウンセラー	(e-mail sent) <i>counsellor of 'the world of the spiritual'</i>
131	INNERSCAPE (中野) ヒーリング、催眠療法の個人セッション、ワークショップ開催	(e-mail sent) <i>healing</i>
132	<a href="#">リラクゼーションサテライト星洲 (新橋)</a> 東洋のマッサージと西洋のアロマセラピーが合体	(not relevant) <i>massage, aromatherapy</i>
133	川元紅岬のオフィシャルページ (新宿) 風水、護符、アストラルクリアリング、自己実現	(e-mail sent) <i>astral clearing</i>
134	<a href="#">ラヴェンドール (渋谷)</a> スピリチュアル・ヒーリング、透視リーディング、アロマセラピー他	(e-mail sent) <i>spiritual healing</i>
135	ソング・ライト☆ヴォイス・ヒーリング (青山) 世界で一つのあなただけの癒しの唄とリーディング by 光矢	(not relevant) <i>voice healing</i>
136	A t e l i e r ☆Etoile 代官山 ヒプノセラピー・クリスタルヒーリング・ヨーガセラピー	(wrong e-mail address) <i>hypnotherapy</i>
137	☆アムーリア・ヒーリング・A☆ (文京区) 小林舞花・麗奈の透視リーディングとスピリチュアルヒーリング	(wrong e-mail address) <i>spiritual healing</i>
138	★グリーンヤードキュアセンター★ (田園調布) 身体・精神・魂の融合！スピリチュアル・ホリスティック施術院	(link not working)
139	<a href="#">Aroma Sundries (東京)</a>	(link not working)



I made contact with the rest of my informants using three other methods. First, searches on the Google search engine were conducted twice: on 5 March 2009, I used the keyword “*reinōsha*”, and contacted by e-mail four salons, two of which replied positively. Next, on 2 September 2009, as I was preparing my research trip to Okinawa prefecture, I used the words ‘*Miyako supirichuaru*’ and ‘*Okinawa supirichuaru*’ to find and contact four spiritual therapists, and eventually managed to interview three. Second, at the suggestion of one my informants who, besides the web portal, was also included in an inventory of spiritual therapists in book-format, I used two such publications to contact (following the same criteria as with the online inventories) a total of 16 practitioners, half of whom I was able to meet later. Those inventories both published in 2009 by the same company are entitled *I can’t take it any more! 50 specialists of the soul who will relieve and revive your tired soul* (four interviewed out of six) and *For this issue, go to this healer/fortune-teller/ qigong therapist - 72 listed* (four interviewed out of ten). Third, I was introduced to the remaining twelve therapists by a third party: more precisely, seven were introduced to me by other therapists, two Japanese researchers working in the field of shamanism gave me the contact details of another three therapists, I heard of two from friends who had used their services in the past, and I encountered the last one at a public event.

Electronic communication was used to contact most of my informants (61 out of 68)<sup>42</sup>. My message stated my status as a doctoral candidate at a British university conducting field research in Japan on spiritual therapies and the influence that I believe

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<sup>42</sup> See Appendix 1.

these therapies have on contemporary Japanese society. I asked to talk to them about their profession and assured them of the anonymity of the process, the approximate length of the interview and the fact that I would not record the conversation, but would take notes instead. I consciously avoided using the word ‘interview’<sup>43</sup> (except in the last sentence of my message), but used the words ‘discussion’ or ‘advice’, for example, as the subject of my electronic communication. I also refrained from giving too much detail about the content of my questions and my personal opinion on spiritual therapies leaving it up to those interested to ask for clarification.

As stated in my message, the therapist usually chose the location and time for the interview. Half of the time, the interview took place at the salon, the place where the therapist usually conducted his or her sessions. The remaining interviews occurred in coffee shops near railway stations and, most of the time, I took care of the bill unless the informant really insisted on paying for his or her own drink. I never remunerated any therapist for the interview and was never asked to do so. However, I made sure to purchase any books written by the therapists and advertised on their website (four of them did so) and also paid for the therapies I underwent (on four occasions) or contributed towards the salon’s rental fee when necessary (again, on two occasions).

Although interviews usually lasted from 90 minutes to four hours, with the exception of six practitioners whom I visited multiple times, preparations for the interviews the day before and the return trip to the designated location required usually one day to one-day-and-a-half per interview. As mentioned earlier, my fieldwork

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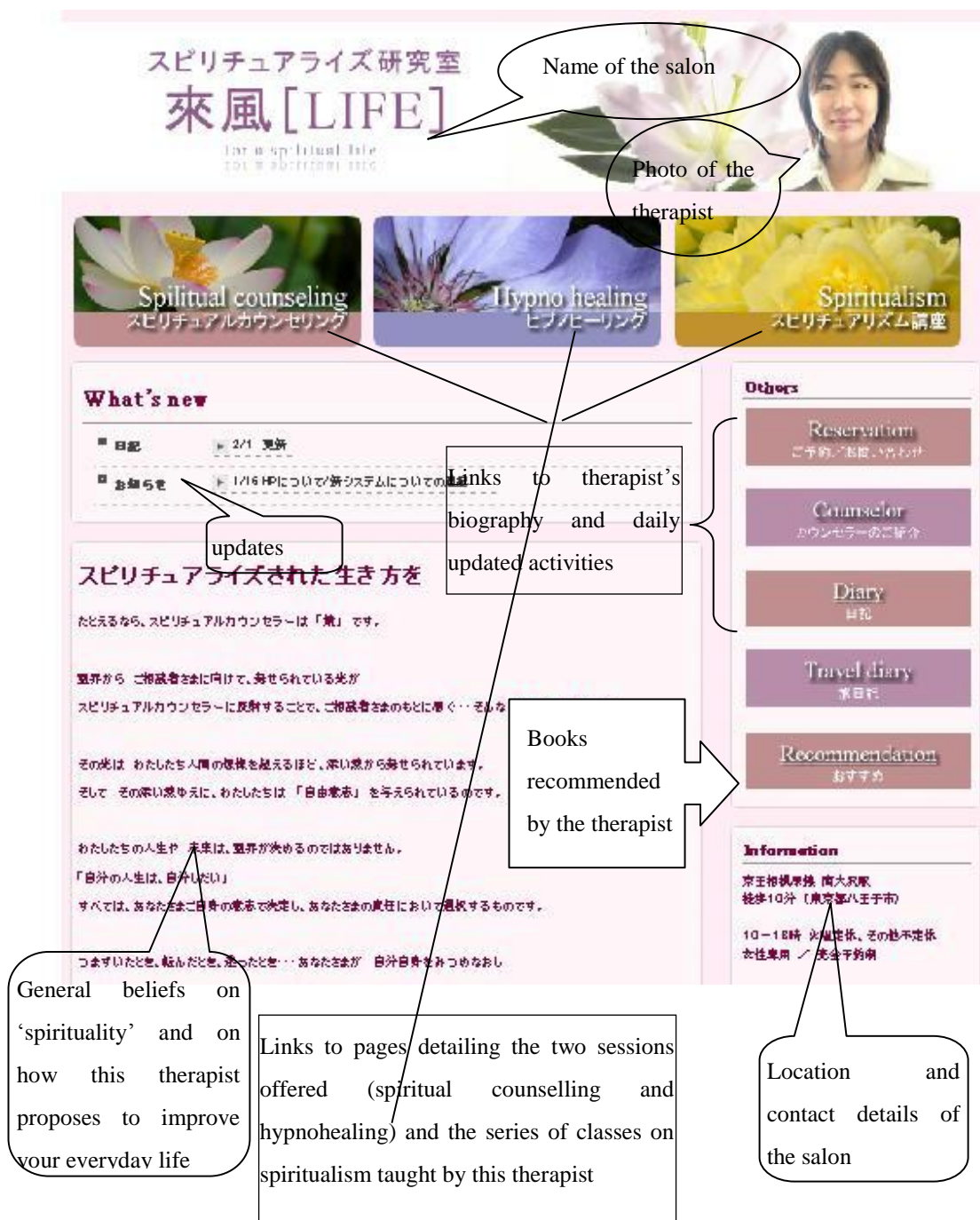
<sup>43</sup> I later read that this is a recommended approach when undertaking fieldwork in Japan (see McLaughlin, 2010), but I also think that the appropriate inclusion of the word ‘interview’ was useful in setting the terms of the discussion, namely that, ultimately, I was a researcher and not a client seeking therapy.

focussed on the Tokyo and surrounding prefectures of Kanagawa, Chiba and Saitama. Despite, however, my strategic choice of choosing Mitaka-city, west of Tokyo, as my base, my average commuting time was one hour 30 minutes, and the longest trip undertaken was a three-hour ride by train and then by bus to Ichihara-city in Chiba prefecture (100km away). A minority of practitioners were visited in others parts of Japan: I spent two weeks in Okinawa prefecture, meeting one therapist working on the island of Miyako, two on mainland Okinawa and one on Amami Island. I also visited three times during my 14-month fieldwork period, the northern part of Miyazaki prefecture where I listened to the stories of two practitioners in the towns of Nobeoka and Takachiho.

There was no time limit for the answers and according to the flow of the discussion I usually also enquired on matters that seemed more interesting or needed clarification, such as dates, names of places visited, names of seminars or spiritual academies attended, meaning of certain concepts or theories and so forth. Except for eight practitioners on whom there was no way of finding information beforehand, the remaining therapists had a website and/or blog which provided a basic curriculum vitae composed of the various certificates held by the owner and allowing him or her to practice this or that therapy, a priced menu of the therapies, seminars and products offered to customers including a description of each of them, the therapist's view on life and the spiritual even if only expressed in one sentence (see section 5.1.), and occasionally some feedback from previous customers. Including other minor details (spiritual therapists and the internet are dealt with in more detail in Chapter 4), I can say that for the majority of the time I had a very good idea whom I was going to interview and I managed to concentrate on my most pressing inquiries. An example of the first

page of such a website is provided on the following page. However, design and details vary a lot, depending on the skill and time spent on constructing and updating the website. In this instance, I chose one of the most common types: a non-professional page built and updated by the therapist herself, who happened also to be a housewife.

Figure 2.2 Sample of a spiritual therapist’s website



After, the interview, on the same day or the day after, I always sent an e-mail thanking the therapist for his time and wishing him/her a pleasant life, hinting that, at least in the near future, we would not meet again. Indeed, 62 out of the 68 spiritual therapists were only met and interviewed once, while specific precautions were also taken before and during the interview. Before I turn to these precautions, however, in the next section, I propose to discuss the advantages and disadvantages that my foreign status and non-disciplinary approach granted me in the field.

### **2.3. The benefits of being a “sympathetically detached foreigner”.**

Miyaji Naoko, the cultural psychologist mentioned in the Preface, argues that ‘the researcher’s own vulnerability, such as being a woman or having other minority status, sometimes helps to blur the boundary between the researcher and the researched’ (1998, 237). Miyaji, as a female psychiatrist (thus “healer”) among the female shamans of Miyako Island, felt that she came closer to, and better understood, her informants than her fellow researchers. The same, I believe, happened to me, although my vulnerabilities were of another kind. The most obvious one was, of course, that I am not Japanese. As Ian Reader remarks, ‘a distinct advantage for foreigners when doing fieldwork in Japan is that they can slide around normative rules of appropriate behaviour’ (2003, 103). Indeed, as for many before me, my foreignness allowed the ignorance of protocol several times which, in my case, meant saving money and posing bold questions.

It is generally the custom when attending gatherings centred around a charismatic person, such as three of the practitioners who became my informants for a short while, that an envelope containing a certain sum of money, from ¥3,000 to ¥10,000 (excluding special circumstances such as celebratory events) is donated as an expression of constant gratitude and a contribution to any expenses raised by such gatherings. In most of these instances, despite my will to at least pay for the lunch or dinner provided, I was exempt by order of the head of the group, who was always the practitioner I was there to study. In more important events, however, such as, for example, the Star Festival organised by Ms Natani, the *ogamiya* in Nobeoka-city, or the monthly purification ritual at the Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo for Ms Minami's community, it was important to follow the rules to the letter to avoid becoming an outcast and losing my "special status", which in other circumstances allowed me to enquire on matters never spoken about before. I shall describe one of these instances hereafter.

The aforementioned community centred on the *reinōsha*, Ms Minami, is mostly composed of some of her former clients who, after having recovered from their individual problems thanks to the sessions with Ms Minami, became her most fervent believers and key actors in the daily activities and organisation of her increasingly cult-resembling following. One day I had the opportunity to participate in one of their weekly gatherings and, as we were all about to have lunch together, I asked Ms Minami if I could question everyone individually on their reason for joining her community, knowing very well that my presence there was imposed by my relationship with the *reinōsha* and that no one would really be willing to open up to me. To my surprise, however, as soon as the empty lunch packs had been put away, Ms Minami turned towards her audience and asked every one of the 20 participants to stand up and

describe to me the first occasion that they had met her. Needless to say the next hour was one of the most memorable of my fieldwork. But, most significantly, I realized from listening to the small talk afterwards, that for the majority of those present, despite their long-running acquaintance, it was the first time those experiences had ever been brought up in conversation.

The bending of rules and etiquette is, as in the example above, often coupled with the will to show to the foreign researcher the worth of the healer's abilities, or more generally to teach him the correct traditional customs that all Japanese should, according to many of my informants, adopt. Such behaviour is, I am certain, not unknown to students of Japan, and it can sometimes lead to awkward, yet very enriching encounters. To refrain from repeating such observations here, which are best consulted in *Doing Fieldwork in Japan* (Bestor, Steinhoff and Bestor, 2003), I will narrate only the most extraordinary one.

Ms Okubo, a *reinōsha*, who will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, seemed keen very early on to teach me the proper ways of conducting one's life according to Shinto beliefs and customs. One such occasion was her invitation to climb Mount Tsukuba with her most prestigious follower and the main source of funds for her activities, Mr Okazaki, a patron from the underground world. This would have been the third year for Mr Okazaki to wake up early, fast and dress in white, as we all did on that cold day in February 2009, and follow the 800m trail to the double-peaked mountain in Ibaraki prefecture, located approximately 100km north-east of Tokyo. To my surprise, however, when I arrived at the designated train station, from where we would drive by car to the bottom of Mount Tsukuba, I did not meet Ms Okubo and her usual company of elderly women. Instead, I found myself sitting at the back of a black wagon with

tinted windows, surrounded by Mr Okazaki's band of handlers, their tattooed arms occasionally showing from beneath their sleeves and their conversations full of unspecified objects such as '*are*' (that), '*ano hito*' (that man) and '*soko*' (there) sounding more suspicious than they might have been. The day which was otherwise uneventful (see figure 2.3) was later, I heard, meant to teach me about the strong will and ties binding men who, once a year, climb Mount Tsukuba (and run back to the bottom) to cleanse their body and spirit. For me, besides the obvious ethnographic interest in taking part in this type of pilgrimage, it had also been a unique opportunity to come as close to a band of *yakuza* as I could ever have been.

Figure 2.3 With Okazaki's band at the summit of Mt. Tsukuba



One final advantage of being a foreigner was, I believe, specific to my case and was due to the image of Western countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States as the part of the globe where spirituality and the therapies related to it are the most developed and most recognized among the general population. Thus, my interest in spiritual therapies turned me, in the eyes of many of my informants, into an expert on



“the spiritual” and the New Age Movement. Many thought that the university where I studied was a centre of research on spiritual therapies (of course I quickly corrected their impression); others, as mentioned in the last section of this chapter, feared that I would steal their techniques and bring them back to Europe; still others, on finding out about my Greek nationality, believed I was a member of the Researchers of Truth (a group founded by the students of a Cypriot healer known as Daskalos which holds annual meetings in Tokyo), or worse, a descendant of the oracle of Delphi. Although I refuted all such theories about the purpose of my study and clarified my purely academic approach to studying the role of spiritual therapists in contemporary Japanese society, I do not doubt that these predispositions worked to my advantage, which first and most importantly translated into a high rate of positive answers to my requests for interviews. Indeed, many replies included the sentence ‘you probably know more than me, but I don’t mind meeting you’ which demonstrated certain expectations. Although my electronic message to the spiritual therapists asking permission to interview them suggested no more than its content, I started to believe that my expression “as you know, in the West...” (which was inspired by the stories that I had heard previously from Japanese spiritual therapists themselves) may have been misinterpreted. The eventual unforeseen hindrances provoked by the use of such an expression remain to be considered in the following section, but here, I will mention one instance in which such over-expectations raised me to an unwanted status.

As the number of interviews increased and I started understanding the concepts and theories used by the contemporary Japanese spiritual therapists, naturally as a researcher, I began using the same terms in order to clarify the positions of the informants within the multitude of current practices. Unfortunately (or not), two

therapists concluded that I knew more than they did and they devised a plan to gather some of their clients and fellow practitioners to have a debate about spiritual theories. One hot day in August 2009, I found myself, therefore, at the head of a restaurant table discussing with five spiritual therapists and three of their clients the truth about the advent of the Ascension year<sup>44</sup> (set for the year 2012), the effectiveness of reconnection healing and other popular themes among enthusiasts of “the spiritual” (see figure 2.4). The experience was very fruitful for my research, but it was one of the most stressful days of my life.

Figure 2.4 Roundtable discussions with spiritual therapies in Enoshima



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<sup>44</sup> Typical New Age concept that bears several meanings depending on who is using it, but, in a general sense, is supposed to be the year humanity will reach the next level in human evolution: the “spiritual” level.

To the beneficial vulnerability of being a foreigner, I will add that my inductive approach to research was automatically dictated by both my educational and personal background. My undergraduate degree in area studies supplied me with an understanding of Japan in a vast array of fields, but with no in-depth theoretical basis to any of those fields, and thus, almost automatically, obliged me to start from the facts and eclectically borrow explanatory models from various disciplines, from the sociology of religion to cultural psychiatry. I soon started realizing that it was the “story” that was most important and not how I interpret that story. Later, I came across a name for this approach to research in one of my supervisors’ recent publications, where it was called ‘jobbing’, a method which aimed at reaching a logical narrative built out of ‘a range of materials gathered from field observations, interviews, surveys, casual conversations and encounters, and a mix of published and unpublished data, and drawing eclectically on certain concepts and frameworks’ (King, 2009, 18). From another perspective, I could also say that I did not just borrow from any discipline indiscriminately, but moved along the line of disciplines that have strong connections with anthropology and which linked specifically to medical anthropology. Indeed, according to Dana Dunn (2009), there exists a disciplinary line joining medical anthropology (or its mirrored image in the discipline of medicine: cultural psychiatry) to personality psychology, passing through the disciplines of social psychology, sociology, and general anthropology. All I do, therefore, in the following chapters, is travel back and forth along this generation line and the sub-categories of each of these disciplines, when it is deemed necessary.

Finally, regarding my personal background, I believe that my very loose connection with any religious tradition made me the ideal candidate for adopting Bryan

Wilson's 'sympathetic detachment' behaviour. Explaining his approach when studying new religious movements, Wilson argued: 'to understand a religious group does require empathetic insight, but empathy need not lead to advocacy (...) Of course, a sociologist might begin as a committed man of faith. Ideally, he should be able to suspend belief, set aside his commitment no less than a non-believer suspends critical disbelief' (1982, 184). While such an approach remains "ideal", I consider that it would have been much more difficult to suspend belief than critical disbelief. Without dismissing research in the field of religious studies in Japan, for example, I often wondered about the critical ability of local researchers who kindly introduced me to shamanistic practitioners whom they had not only been studying, but also occasionally visiting to seek advice on personal issues. Sasaki Shin'ichi, previously quoted for his critique of studies on shamanism in Japan, blames the purely descriptive approach that these studies have taken and even expands his criticism to foreign works, such as I.M. Lewis's *Ecstatic Religion* (1989[1971]), in which he claims that he cannot find the author's personal opinion (Sasaki, 2006, 453).

Similar criticism has also recently been directed towards research on the new spirituality culture in Japan. Horie Norichika in his study of "the spiritual" prefers what he calls a constructionist approach that reveals how the members of this culture understand "spirituality", rather than the critical approach of Sakurai Yoshihide who focusses on the scandals within the spiritual business, or the methodology of Kashio Naoki and Shimazono Susumu who sometimes tend to find "spirituality" in practices where no such concept is ever used (Horie, forthcoming). I consider therefore that my original non-disciplinary background combined with a certain "disbelief" allowed me to look for spiritual therapy only where it was said to exist and be empathetic about its role

(considering my assumption that this role was related to the well-being of contemporary Japanese society), but also prevented me from seeing only innocent faith-based practices where money-making objectives had the upper hand. My approach required, I believe, certain precautions and I propose to discuss these in the following section.

#### **2.4. Interviewing spiritual therapists: never too cautious.**

I have already noted that information, particularly interview content and personal opinion on “the spiritual”, was minimal in the first electronic communication sent to the 61 practitioners who could be contacted by such means. The reason was that I did not know what the receiver of the message would do with the information included, thus I limited myself to confirming my status with the prospective interviewee and my desire to arrange to talk anonymously with an informed person about his/her profession. As a result, only eight out of the 61 practitioners contacted required further clarification before agreeing to be interviewed. The requested clarifications can be divided into three categories: questions related to the research centre to which I belong and misunderstandings due to the absence of information in Japanese on the centre<sup>45</sup>'s web page or to the idea that White Rose was the symbol of a spiritualist centre. Secondly, questions regarding my future use of the data to which I promptly responded that the information would be mainly gathered for the purpose of writing a doctoral thesis at my home university, while in other cases (presentation or academic article) it would be summarized and grouped with the rest of my interviews. Here, of course, as I discussed in the previous section, my objective of using the data outside of Japan played, I

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<sup>45</sup> White Rose East Asia Centre ([www.wreac.org](http://www.wreac.org)).

believe, a significant role in the subsequent acceptance for an interview. And finally, clarification about my belief or disbelief in spiritual therapies, or even my eventual activities as a spiritual therapist was also sometimes required. For example, a practitioner ended her long list of prerequisites with the following: ‘I am writing this e-mail with the help of angels. Can you accept that?’<sup>46</sup> Similar questions were also asked during my interviews and the answer was on both occasions the same: ‘I have never had any “spiritual experience” or practised any therapeutic technique. I accept your belief in those therapies and wish to describe the various healing techniques and experiences of spiritual therapists in my thesis. I am not a journalist looking to either criticize or praise your profession. I am just looking to understand it.’ My “sympathetically detached” answer must have been satisfactory because only one from the 19 negative (implicitly or explicitly) responses to my request for interviewing asked for such clarification but never contacted me again.

During the interview other precautions were also taken. As noted in section 2.2, I attempted to minimize from the beginning the creation of an interviewer-interviewee relationship in which I asked the questions and the therapist answered. As I had presumed (and later confirmed to be true for 95 per cent of my informants) the practitioners had never been questioned before about their practice, and, most importantly, were used to leading the discussion in one-to-one situations in which the person across the room was always a client in need. My purpose was to keep the neutral position of someone who is neither a journalist who is going to gain from writing a defamatory article about their profession (as some therapists confirmed to have feared), nor a fan of “the spiritual” who was there to try out their techniques for a corresponding

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<sup>46</sup> Communication of 6 May 2009.

price. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, the majority of the therapists are often visited by people who do not have any issues, but wish to try out a new style of therapy, exchange their views and learn from a connoisseur. And the therapists do not hesitate at all in those cases to ask for large compensation, since no such client ever comes back to complain about his/her session.

To those whom I met many times, an inexpensive gift, usually sweets, was offered on the occasion of our second meeting. To avoid the construction of power relationships and to encourage the interviewee to enjoy this unpaid period of time, I also made sure that I wore very casual clothes, particularly for one-time interviews, that I accepted anything offered to drink and broke up the interview from time to time with amusing stories about my misadventures as a foreigner in Japan. I always concluded the discussion with what I had heard for the first time (as compared to other interviews) in the therapist's testimony. Most significantly, and this required a lot of training, I specifically controlled my expression, often trying to imitate the interviewee's when a particular narration required, for example, astonishment or laughter. This may sound obvious and straightforward, but, at the beginning of my fieldwork, a few discussions involving seeing ghosts<sup>47</sup> or flying on UFOs were cut short because I had remained relatively expressionless on hearing about them. Later, however, my ability to empathize improved, although it was at times stretched to its limits. I describe hereafter such an occasion.

Sitting under a tree, in a central Tokyo park, I was about to start asking my usual questions to the "angel therapist" who had accepted my invitation on this sunny day in

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<sup>47</sup> Ghosts (*yūrei*) are conceived as apparitions of the spirits of the dead in our world (Harukawa, 2009, 326).

June 2009. Suddenly, however, I heard a scream of joy, and as I lifted my head from my notebook, I heard Ms Kayama exclaim: ‘Can you see them? Those fairies under the tree. Can you see them? They are smiling at you!’ Taken by surprise, for a moment, I remained motionless, but soon managed to whisper while looking towards the direction of the tree: ‘I am sorry Ms Kayama. I don’t have your abilities, but I’m glad there are fairies to accompany our discussion’.

Needless to say, the interviews and other activities did not always go as planned. First of all, the reason I met 62 of the 68 therapists only once is simple, and at the same time, an essential precaution to take in this field of research. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, spiritual therapists rely mainly on word-of-mouth popularity and on the rare advertisement in a specialized publication to attract customers. For many of them therefore, the interest and visit from a British university researcher offers a unique opportunity to “prove” their worth, either by them writing about me on their internet blog or, if possible, by getting me to write something in their newsletter or on their website<sup>48</sup>. Indeed, the *reinōsha* mentioned earlier, Ms Okubo, on my second visit to her house, asked me to write a short article for her monthly magazine in which I would express my perspective as a foreigner on Shinto and the “correct” way of life related to it as promoted by Ms Okubo herself. On another occasion, the wife of a *reinōsha*, Ms Sasaki, who also worked as an English language teacher, sent me an e-mail after I had spent the second day observing her husband’s sessions, with the following message: ‘We am (*sic*) also interested in what you have in your mind after observation. We really would like to know your impression and some ideas. Would you let us know your

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<sup>48</sup> I was very well aware of the way misuse, extortion or exploitation of information on the internet can hinder the researcher’s work (see Yamaguchi, 2007).



opinion in English?’<sup>49</sup> I had to recognize her effort to write to me in English, surpassing thus her usual reluctance to show her foreign language skills to a non-Japanese with whom she had been conversing in her native tongue. In Mr and Ms Sasaki’s mind the effort was, however, worth it. The previous year, they had both returned disappointed at the very poor level of reaction to Mr Sasaki’s presentation at the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain, and were probably looking for a way to mend the *reinōsha*’s failed visit abroad with the “help of a local specialist”.

Fortunately, both of the above attempts to use my position occurred early during my fieldwork, allowing me to polish my refusals and adapt my approach to interviews accordingly. My rejection of such a degree of involvement was not only meant to maintain my academic integrity, but also to protect my subject of research, the spiritual therapists themselves. Two local university professors, one cultural psychologist and one researcher in religious studies who had studied religious charismatic healers in Hokkaido and Okinawa respectively, had already warned me of the dangers of a close, continuous examination of such practitioners. In their cases, the focus on those particular healers provoked post-fieldwork unrest in the local communities because those healers suddenly attempted to expand their authority outside the therapeutic realm and ended up, in practice, being brought before a tribunal. Although such outcomes may arguably be difficult to control, with the use of the internet and the rising concern with private information accompanying it, and particularly in the domain of spiritual healing which often answers to the same rules of privacy as the doctor-patient relationship, it has become very easy for the careless fieldworker to “destroy” his/her field. Hereafter, I offer such an example.

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<sup>49</sup> Communication of 24 March 2009.

During the summer of 2008, I decided to contact the webmaster of an internet page that was dedicated to a community of fans of *yuta*, the shamanistic practitioners mostly found in Okinawa prefecture, and which was discussed in an article by a local researcher who analysed the profiles and conversations of the members of that community, found in the online forum of the website. Originally surprised that the academic article contained a non-anonymized copy of the forum's webpage, I decided to visit the webpage and, if possible, obtain an interview from the webmaster. To my further astonishment I found out that the free accessible webpage had been closed down and moved to a social network service, Mixi, to which I had to give my address and phone number to be able to join that same community. Nevertheless, the webmaster agreed to be interviewed and revealed that, after he discovered the researcher's published work, he thought of it as an advertisement for his efforts and rushed to inform the participants of his online forum, who, on the contrary, took it as an infringement of their privacy and decided to leave the community, now reduced to one sixth of its membership.

This last mistake particularly pertains to the Internet where one comes across a vast amount of data that would otherwise be considered private. But what is often ignored in the treatment of this information is the 'intended audience for an individual's online expression: even those who are comfortable making all their contributions public may still resent their use as a topic of research' (Elm, 2009, 84). This can be also valid the other way around. A researcher's presentation or publication intended to be read by the academic community, may become available online and be accessed by the subjects of the research and possibly hinder the researcher's return to fieldwork. In my case, although I was never able to evaluate the negative impact of the online availability of an

abstract in which I was discussing the nationalistic theories of a *reinōsha*, I will always consider that some spiritual therapists may not have answered my request for an interview from then on because they had checked that particular abstract before contacting me.

In the words of Amelie Nothomb: ‘looking is choosing. He, who looks, decides to focus on this or that object and necessarily exclude the rest. That is why looking, which is life’s essence, is first a refusal. To live means to refuse’ (2000, 20). My most significant refusals were to invade people’s privacy, change or even hinder their livelihoods, take something without giving back. This “do not intrude” norm of fieldwork practice that Wolcott argues to be ‘cultural’ (2005, 96), but which I believe needs to be universal, was probably my strongest area of vulnerability. This attitude forced me constantly to try to balance my position between researcher and simple observer and to take decisions that may have prevented me from producing a more detailed picture of the phenomena I studied. I have tried however, in the following chapters to compensate for this eventual lack of detail by adopting a holistic perspective, because, as Michael Agar argues, ‘an isolated observation cannot be understood unless you understand its relationships to other aspects of the situation in which it occurred’ (1996, 125). And finally, as I now remind myself of the stress and unrest felt on the train back from an interview, which had been unwillingly invasive, I am glad that sometimes I played the role of the simple observer.

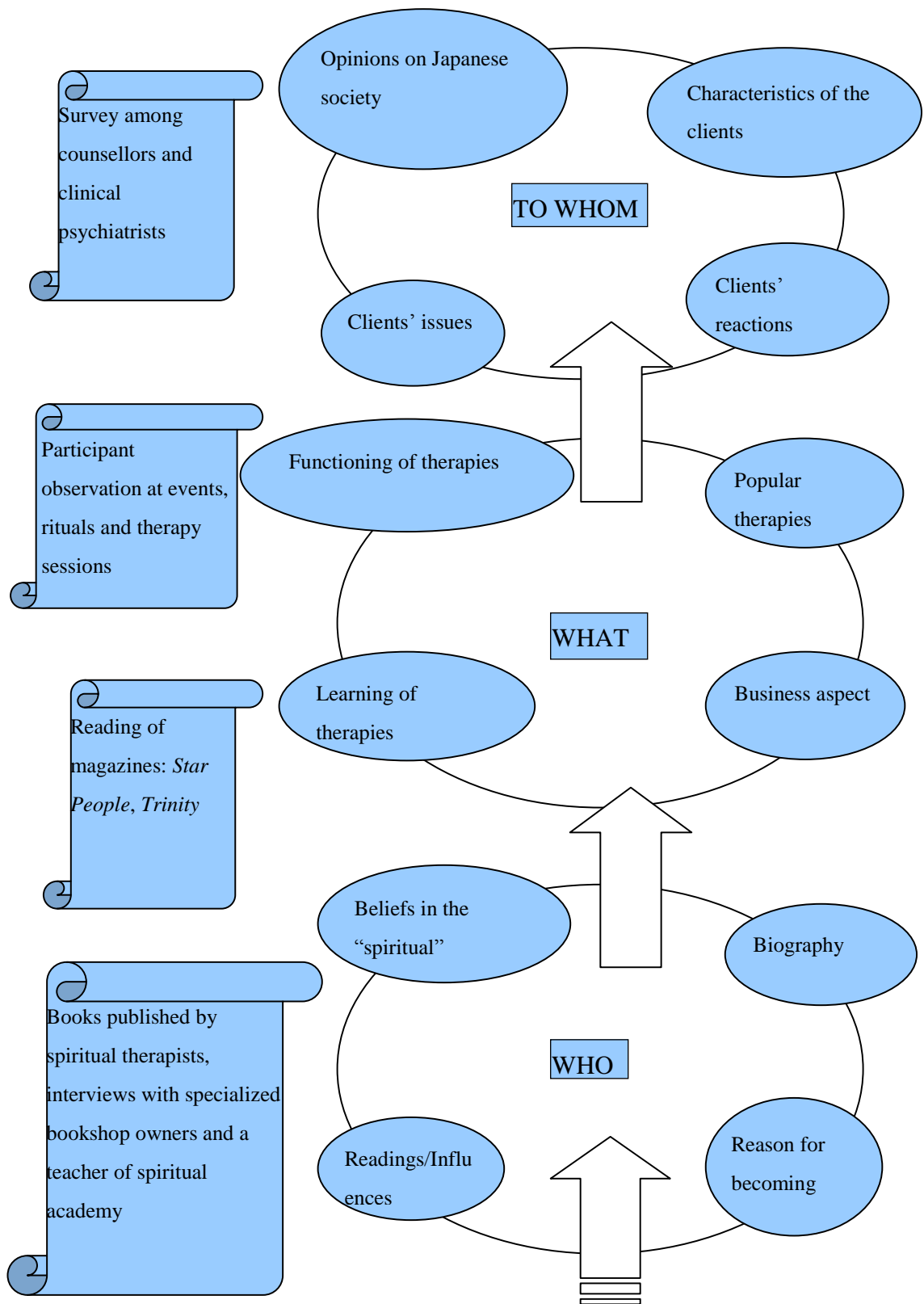
### **Chapter 3: The Spiritual Therapists: Facts and Figures**

Studying the socio-medical role of the contemporary shamanistic practitioners of Japan, as we have seen in Chapter 2, quickly turned to research on the roles of the spiritual therapists themselves and what their popularity tells us about Japanese society today. The reasons are twofold: considering the Ehara Hiroyuki-driven popularity of what seemed to be the strongly related, but often dissimilar forms of “traditional” shamanistic practices which I had originally made preparations to investigate, I found myself lacking essential information on these new, contemporary types of practitioners whose socio-medical roles I endeavoured to examine. Secondly, I was constantly refused access to the clients who were supposed to be the focus of my research. My initial research questions, such as ‘what are the social characteristics of the clients?’, ‘why do they usually consult a *reinōsha*?’, and ‘how is the session perceived by the clients?’ for example, could not therefore be answered. In fact, only three of the 68 individuals I interviewed agreed for me to talk to their clients, and among them, only one of them agreed on being absent from the discussions. Therefore, it simply became impossible to form a sufficiently objective view of the clients’ experience during my stay in Japan.

Given these limitations and difficulties I decided to collect as much data as I could on the practitioners themselves, hoping to understand their clients and Japanese society, through the former’s stories and their practices. The main focus of my interview questions can be divided into three parts: ‘who are these spiritual therapists?’, ‘what are they doing?’ and ‘to whom are they doing it?’ Additionally, each of these three components was informed by data collected through other means: reading books and magazines written and read by spiritual therapists, attending events showcasing spiritual

therapies ('Spiritual Market', 'Iyashi Fair' and 'Sacred Planet'), rituals, gatherings and therapy sessions, and finally conducting two short, internet-based surveys asking counsellors and clinical psychologists active in Japan for their opinions on spiritual therapists. Figure 3.1 below shows this operationalisation of my research questions. Subsequently, each of the first three sections of this chapter will deal separately with each of the three main components, while the limitations of this research will be discussed in the last section. The information gathered in addition to the interviews will be introduced directly into my arguments in the following chapters (where necessary), and will not be dealt with in this chapter. Finally, the concluding section will demonstrate the appropriateness of my methodology.

Figure 3.1 Operationalisation



### **3.1. A life choice?**

One of the most immediate observations that can be made regarding my sample of spiritual therapists is that the majority, 55 out of 68, are women. Most practitioners (51) are aged between 35 and 50 years old, with the oldest, Ms Natto, being 80, and the youngest, Ms Hirayama, being 27. Additionally, 25 were married at the time of the interview (one of them for the second time) and 43 were single, with ten among them having gone through a divorce. Although, I could not consistently obtain information on their family background, two aspects of the practitioners' lives before they took the path towards spiritual therapy became clear from my interviews. The first concerns their professional life. Today the majority (52) have quit their regular jobs and practice spiritual therapy full-time. The remaining 16 are part-time therapists usually conducting sessions in their free time, evenings and weekends. It is worth noting here that four of these 16 part-timers, Ms Okubo, Mr Kimura, Ms Natto and Mr Kogura, have combined their consultation work with their current jobs: Ms Okubo and Mr Kimura have become heads of their own non-religious organisations originally formed around their former clients and have expanded their activities into education, volunteer work, and other services. Ms Natto, who lives in the outskirts of Nobeoka-city has succeeded to her father's position as guardian of the nearby mountain and its two waterfalls which have been a pilgrimage site since the nineteenth century. Therefore, her spiritual powers go hand-in-hand with her original role within the community, a role she was combining with a clerical job at the city hall until her retirement. Finally, Mr Kogura is head priest of a shrine in the town of Takachiho and conducts therapy sessions on the phone, by fax and face-to-face, while also carrying out his official religious duties.

Regarding their previous or present employment, most spiritual therapists (16) reported to have been employed in some type of clerical/office job (*jimu*), while several had been occupying a sales position (*eigyō*). The rest of the professions mentioned by my informants can be found in the following table in which I mark as p.t. those who are still holding that job.

Table 3.1 Number of therapists per type of employment

Type of employment	Number of therapists
Office work	16 (p.t. 3)
Sales	14 (p.t. 5)
Systems Engineer <sup>50</sup>	6 (p.t. 1)
Reporter/writer	5 (p.t. 2)
Housewife	5 (p.t. 2)
Accountant	3
Public servant	2
Bar hostess ( <i>mizushōbai</i> )	2
Nursing, Helper	2 (p.t. 1)
High school teacher	2
Fortunetelling	1
Masseur	1
Actress	1
Interpreter	1
PhD student	1
Paediatrician	1 (p.t.)
Night guard	1
Musician	1
Social worker	1
Karate-ka	1

A second set of information on the practitioner's background that I considered relevant for understanding contemporary Japanese spiritual therapists was the level of

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<sup>50</sup> Systems Engineer or S.E. as it is commonly known in Japan is an English term made up in Japan to indicate a type of work, which in other countries is shared between programmers, I.T. consultants and I.T project managers.



commitment of their family and particularly their parents to faith-based activities or involvement in the spiritual therapy profession themselves, and by extension the possible influence which they may have exercised over their offspring during their early childhood. For the purpose of clarification, my question was therefore phrased as follows: ‘were your parents particularly religiously active?’ (*go-ryōshin wa toku ni shūkyō katsudō sarete imashita ka*). Interestingly, almost half (37) of the therapists interviewed responded negatively to this question. The other half’s testimonies can be divided into three categories: those whose family (generally the mother) were fervent followers of one or several religious groups and had a positive influence on their child, those with the same type of family but who reacted badly to their parents’ proselytising, and those whose progenitors were *reinōsha*, or were believed to have special powers, or had often been consulting a *reinōsha*. The number of therapists corresponding to the three categories is shown below, together with sample, illustrative narratives.

Table 3.2 Categories of therapists’ parents committed to faith-based practices

Category of parents committed to faith-based practices	Specification (number of therapists)	Sample narrative
Parents are fervent followers and provoke positive reaction	Shinto (1)	‘my father was head priest and I grew up next to the temple’
	Nichiren (1)	‘my grand-mother was a Catholic nun and used to tell me that Jesus Christ is inside my heart’
	Pure Land sect of Buddhism (1)	‘in primary school I used to go to church every Sunday’
	True Pure Land sect of Buddhism ( <i>Jōdo shinshū</i> ) (2)	‘when I was a kid my parents took me to shrines and temples so often that I started hearing Buddhist chants in my dreams’
	Shingon sect of Buddhism (3)	
	Christian (4)	
	Sōka Gakkai International (1)	

Parents are fervent followers, but provoke a negative reaction	Soka Gakkai International (2) True Pure Land sect of Buddhism (Jōdo shinshū) (1) Other New Religions (Seichō no Ie <sup>51</sup> , PL Kyōdan <sup>52</sup> ) (1)	‘my parents forced me to go to a Buddhist school from where I escaped when I was 15’ ‘I always hated my mother for being so weak and relying on any faith she was told to believe in’
Parents involved in “the spiritual”	Family member was/is in the same profession (5)	‘my mother was a <i>reinōsha</i> ’ ‘my mother has her own salon as a soul therapist outside of Tokyo’
	Family member has spiritual powers (4)	‘my father used to describe to me the ghosts he could see’ ‘my sister is even more powerful than me’
	Family member is interested in “the spiritual” (3)	‘my mother was the one who wanted to open a salon, but I ended up doing it for her’ ‘my mother used to take me to a <i>reinōsha</i> every time there was a problem’

The above information regarding the therapist’s life was obtained during the first part of the interview, which was always structured around a main question: ‘What was the reason for your starting offering sessions?’ As previously mentioned, the website of most practitioners included a short curriculum vitae on which clarification was required,

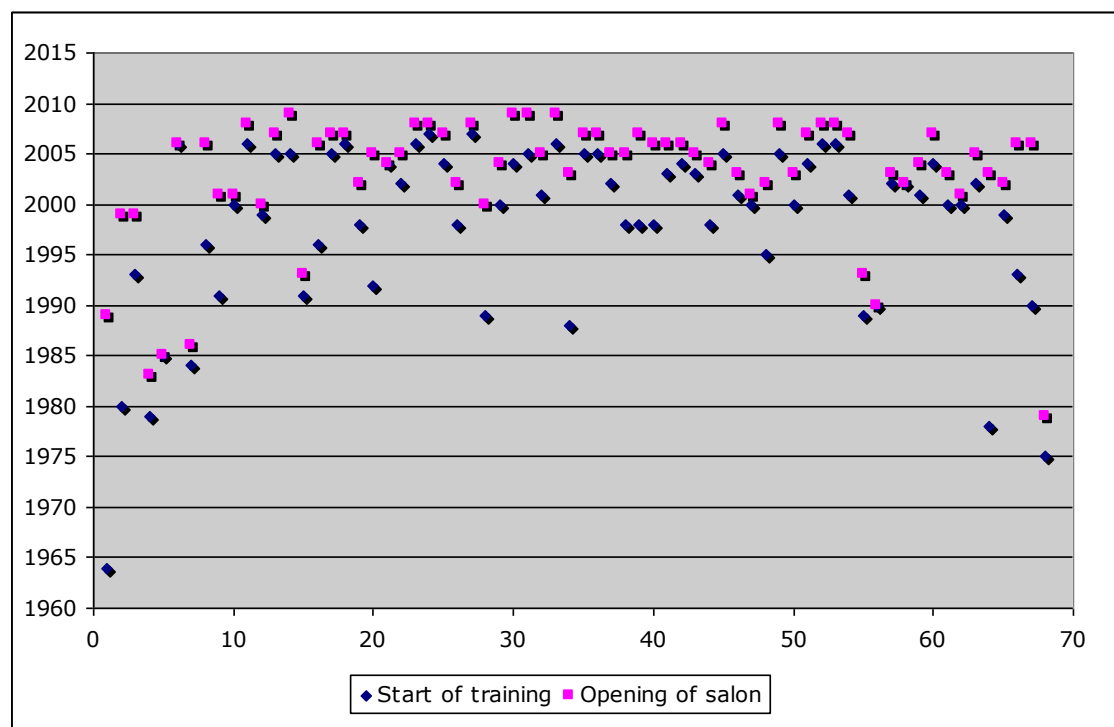
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<sup>51</sup> Literally ‘House of Long Life’ (成長の家), Seichō no Ie is a Shinto-derived new religion founded in 1930 by Taniguchi Masaharu, who was strongly influenced by the New Thought Movement and other early 20<sup>th</sup> century spiritualist concepts and theories, as well as the Ōmoto new religious group (from the *Encyclopedia of Shinto*-<http://eos.kokugakuin.ac.jp/modules/xwords/entry.php?entryID=632> visited 7 March 2009).

<sup>52</sup> The Church of Perfect Liberty is a Shinto-derived new religion with prewar origins and officially established in 1946. The group has a strong following in North and South America (from the *Encyclopedia of Shinto*-visited 7 March 2009).

but it soon became apparent that my main question contained two very different sub-questions: ‘When did you actively join “the spiritual”?’ and ‘When did you decide to become a spiritual therapist?’ Despite the often complex causal narrative comprising the answer to the first question, I always managed to pinpoint, with relative precision, the time and occasion corresponding to the answer to the latter inquiry. The reason for this is that all of the therapists can be said to have undertaken training before they started receiving clients. The majority attended one or several institutions offering professional courses and seminars, while a minority learned from individuals, who, in a few cases happened to be a family member. Below, therefore, I provide a graph showing for every one of the 68 individuals interviewed the date (s)he started training (diamond) and the date (s)he began offering sessions (square). It is worth noting here that the later the therapist started learning spiritual therapeutic techniques the quicker he or she began receiving clients.

Graph 3.1 Comparison between start of training and start of business



Returning to the more complex reasons for becoming interested in the spiritual (*'supirichuaru ni kyōmi o motsu yō ni natta no wa dōshite desu ka?'*), two patterns of narratives can be discerned: those in which a particular succession of events led to a self-reflective, liberating, epiphanic turn towards “the spiritual” and those in which “the spiritual” evolved progressively, first as a hobby and then as a means to earn a living. In the second pattern, the professionalization of a hobby is sometimes accelerated by the occurrence of a particular issue in the individual’s life or by a random encounter.

Ms Kawasaki’s case is typical of the first pattern. After her parents’ business was reduced to bankruptcy, Ms Kawasaki had to go home and take care of her family while also providing financial support. She ended up choosing a job she could do from home and started working as a *manga* (Japanese comic) artist for 18 hours per day on very low pay. Several months later, falling into depression she had to take drugs that seemed to worsen her state. One evening, she watched a television programme introducing a new alternative therapy invented by Brian Weiss, called hypnotherapy. She decided to go for a session, which ended up eradicating her depressive symptoms completely, and which convinced her to become a hypnotherapist.

In this first pattern the significance of the triggering events often became the core of the narrative, masking therefore the influence of other minor (according to the therapist) occurrences that may have contributed to this turn towards “the spiritual”. However, further questioning on these minor events was often met with reluctance and I seldom managed to collect more information except the hints I received throughout the rest of the interview. This reluctance, I believe, was connected to the causal link that was sometimes created between events in the therapist’s childhood and the turn to the spiritual in their adult life, excluding therefore the possibility that a combination of

random happenings may have given the same results. For Ms Kawasaki, an unhappy and poor childhood full of pessimism and unfulfilled wishes was the reason for her depression, an experience which then made her a specialist in depression cases. For others, their profession today was explained by the occurrence of a particular event which reawakened their hidden spiritual powers or convinced them of a destiny they had so far refused to accept. Ms Suzuki, a part-time systems engineer, remembers her father teaching her how to see ghosts, while Ms Murakami, the grand-daughter of a *yuta*, admitted to having stepped in after her older sister refused to follow in her grand-mother's footsteps.

The second pattern is more common and also encompasses a greater variety of cases: from pure curiosity-led encounters with spiritual therapies to fervent enthusiasm from a very young age. Ms Hamata's story is relatively simple. After working as a club hostess (*kyabakura-jō*) for seven years, she decided to invest her savings in a course to become an aesthetician and, through various encounters, she ended up attending a school of channelling<sup>53</sup> and then later teaching meditation. Excessive wealth was also the reason for Ms Fukuyama enrolling on several alternative therapy courses in the U.S. and Japan before a restructuring of her company obliged her to quit and become a full-time practitioner. For others, like Ms Kikuko, it was an early infatuation with the occult through the reading of magazines, playing with tarot cards and participating in internet communities of fans of "the spiritual" that eventually translated into a part-time profession she pursues 'not for the money but because I like it'. In fact, for many of these fans-turned-spiritual therapists, fortune-telling/divination, whose popularity in its

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<sup>53</sup> This small school (school X) where students learn to listen and transmit the information held by their individual guardian deities will be dealt with in Chapter 4 when I introduce the founder and only teacher of the school, Ms Smith.

different forms is probably surpassing that of “the spiritual” in Japan today (as I will show briefly in Chapter 4), has been and still is the most significant point of entry into spiritual therapy, particularly for those who grew up in the fortune-telling boom of the 1980s (see chapter 1).

The distinction between the two patterns, however, remains *a priori* arbitrary, since there are spiritual therapists who belong to both categories, or, in some cases, those who should originally be characterised in terms of the second pattern, but preferred to emphasize the existence of an event that they interpreted as epiphanic for the sake of their own understanding of their decision to follow the path of professional spiritual therapy, and, occasionally, for the sake of the image they wished and/or needed to present to their clients. This phenomenon is significant for the practice of therapy and will be examined in Chapter 6, but it should already be noted that the discussion will be entirely based on the practitioners’ testimonies since I do not possess any other (external) source of information on their lives.

Entrance to the new spirituality culture was also often accompanied, if not instigated, by the reading of a book written by popular authors of this culture. The following list of the most frequently mentioned new spirituality texts marks the end of the first part of the interview, which concerned the background of the spiritual therapists.

The Ehara Hiroyuki-boom was not just limited to television and magazines, but mainly took the form of publications that became best-sellers as soon as they reached the stores. The official homepage of the famous spiritual counsellor ([www.ehara-hiroyuki.com](http://www.ehara-hiroyuki.com)) contains information on 85 books published between 2001 and 2010. In these, Ehara develops his ideas on what spiritualism is and how its practice

can help the human life. Considering the similarity of content between all these publications, the therapists interviewed often found it difficult to remember precisely the titles of which books they had read. Persistent questioning, which sometimes required them to go back to their home and check, revealed however that some of Ehara's most read books were: *Kōun o hikiyoseru supirichuaru bukku* (*A Spiritual Book that Brings you Luck*, 2001), *Supirichuaru seikatsu 12-kagetsu* (*12 Months of Spiritual Lifestyle*, 2001), *Supirichuaru serufu hiiringu* (*Spiritual Self-Healing*, 2003), *Supirichuaru na jinsei ni mezameru tame ni* (*Awakening to a Spiritual Life*, 2003), *Anata no tame no supirichuaru kaunseringu* (*Spiritual Counselling for You*, 2007) and *Nihon no ōra* (*Japan's Aura*, 2007). Other authors from the Japanese spiritual repertoire were also occasionally mentioned (for example, Emoto Masaru and his writings on water memory), particularly if the practitioner had been acquainted with those authors in real life, but the great majority of influential texts were Japanese translations of well-known Western New Age authors.

Starting from the founder of Anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner's works such as his *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment* (*Ika ni shite chō-kankakuteki sekai no ninshiki o kakutoku suru*, 2001[1904-5]), the list of translated texts read by my informants is typical for a New Age adept: Marianne Williamson's *A Course in Miracles* (*Kiseki no gakushu kōsu*, 1998[1976]), Shirley Maclaine's *Out on a Limb* (*Auto on a rimu*, 1986[1986]), James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy* (*Sei naru yogen*, 1996[1994]), Neale Donald Walsch's *Conversations with God* (*Kami to no taiwa*, 2002[1995]) or Brian Weiss' *Many Lives, Many Masters* (*Zense ryōhō*, 1996[1988]). These works were considered must-reads as they set out the general characteristics of the worldview and beliefs of the therapists. They did not however

directly inform the therapies used in everyday activities on which I inquired in the second part of the interview.

### **3.2. A “spiritual” business?**

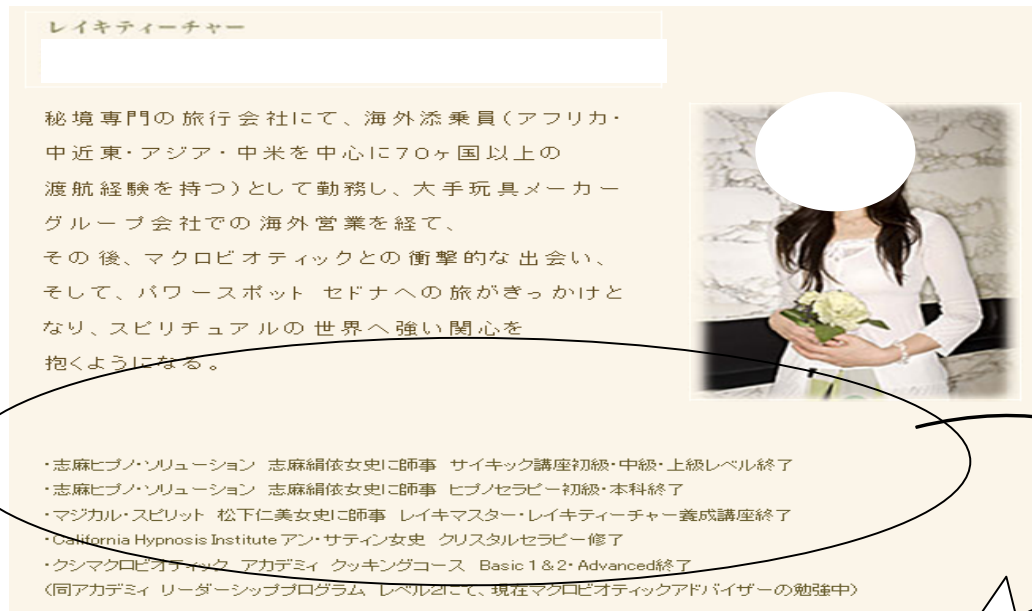
The second part of the interview was structured around the practice of spiritual therapy itself. After inquiring about the type of training and the name of the courses attended, I confirmed the functioning of the sessions displayed on the website and finished with the practicalities of the day-to-day business: pricing, location of the salon, advertising and other costs. I shall discuss the “spiritual business” in detail in Chapter 4. Therefore here I will only mention some general trends.

The majority of the therapists interviewed, 42 out of 68, provided, usually below their short biography on their websites, detailed information regarding their credentials (see Figure 3.1 for a sample). Hence, the average number of courses attended by those therapists is eight, but, as it transpired from the interviews, these lists are not exhaustive and include rather the experience the therapist deems necessary to advertise in order to legitimize his or her practice. These were also courses for which the therapist received a confirmation of attendance, often in the form of a diploma. It is also worth noting that the length of training varies, from two hours for example for the license of *reiki* master/teacher held by Ms Noda (see sample) to the seven years that Ms Murakami spent in learning the *yuta* tradition. But this does not mean that more traditional types of therapists spend more time training and specialize in fewer techniques. Ms Fukuyama had been attending seminars for more than 20 years and currently offers only two types of sessions: hypnotherapy and therapeutic counselling. In fact, it would be impossible to take into account all the opportunities these individuals had to assimilate methods of



conducting therapeutic techniques, considering that intuitive learning was also acquired at gatherings with other professionals or at meetings of semi-cult, cult, or new religious groups that many of the therapists interviewed frequented at some point in their career.

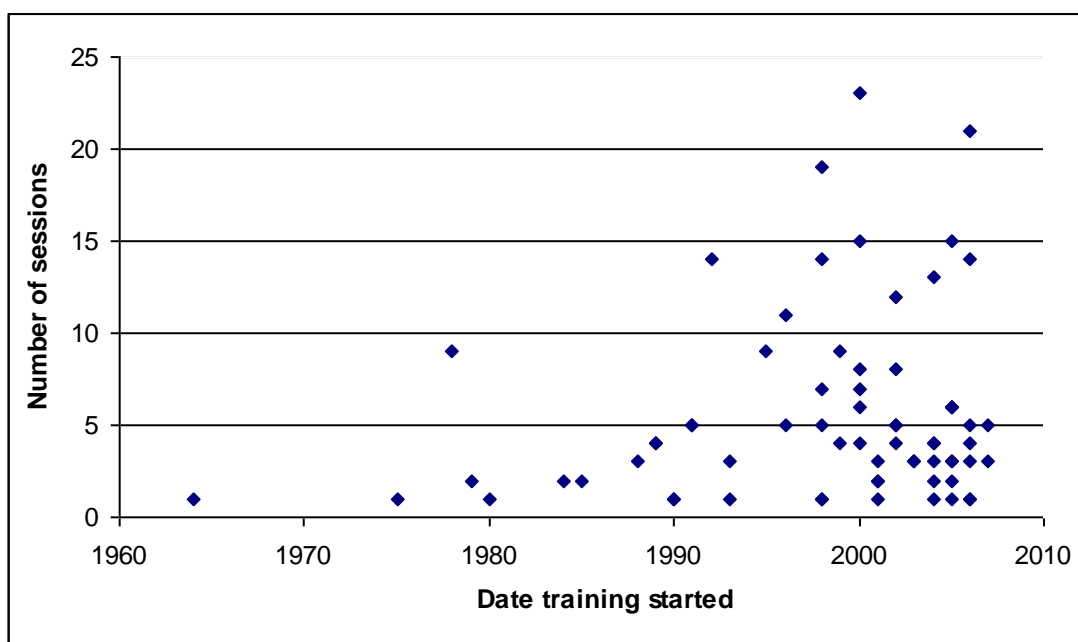
Figure 3.1 Sample of therapist's profile on her website



1. Beginner, advanced and expert level of the 'Psychic Course' taught by Ms Shima Kinue at Shima Hypno-Solution.
2. Advanced and regular level of hypnotherapy taught by Shima Kinue at Shima Hypno-Solution.
3. Reiki master/reiki teacher course taught by Matsushita Hitomi at Magical Spirit
4. Crystal therapy course taught by An Satin from California Hypnosis Institute
5. Basic 1,2 and advanced level of cooking course at the Kushi Macrobiotic Academy
6. (Currently studying for the macrobiotic advisor at level 2 of the leadership program of the same academy)

It would therefore be more meaningful to compare the date when they started their training with the number of sessions offered today by each therapist. From the graph below a tendency becomes clear: there was an increase of availability of training sessions from the mid-1990s onwards as the therapists who started learning since then tended to offer more sessions.

Graph 3.2 Date of start of training and number of sessions offered per therapist



From the figure above, we may also conclude that the average number of sessions offered is approximately five, while in fact more than half of the practitioners (38) offer less than five sessions, and 13 specialize in one type of therapy. Considering the breadth of names and types of therapies, which often, despite identical denominations, bear the original mark of the therapists and thus vary in content<sup>54</sup>, I attempt hereafter to group all therapies provided by the 68 therapists within conceptual categories often found on the websites of companies (such as the one below) that offer a greater number of sessions and thus need to be distinguished.

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<sup>54</sup> In Chapter 5, I will show that, for example, the content of a spiritual counselling session may vary from therapist to therapist.

Figure 3.2 Conceptual categories of spiritual therapies on the website of school Y

The image shows a screenshot of a website's navigation menu for spiritual therapies. The menu is organized into several categories, each with a list of sub-items. Overlaid on the right side of the menu are six conceptual categories in white boxes with black text, connected to the menu items by lines:

- Hypno-type**: Points to the 'ヒプノ(催眠)系' (Hypnosis) category.
- Spiritual-type**: Points to the 'スピリチュアル系' (Spiritual) category.
- Business-type**: Points to the 'ビジネス系' (Business) category.
- Healing-type**: Points to the 'ヒーリング系' (Healing) category.
- Oriental-type**: Points to the 'オリエント系' (Oriental) category.
- Nature-type**: Points to the '自然(ネイチャー)系' (Nature) category.

The website content visible in the background includes a header with 'HOME > セラピーサービス > ヒプノ催眠系', a main heading 'ヒプノセラピー', and a sub-heading '◎とは?' (What is it?). The text describes the therapy as a way to explore past memories and future possibilities through hypnosis, mentioning DNA-level memory and the potential to realize wishes. It also includes a note: '\*このセラピーは前世の因果や特定の因果を問うものではありません。' (This therapy does not ask about past karma or specific karma.)

These categories (and the representative therapies) are as follows:

- hypno-type techniques that aim to hypnotize the client and make him or her re-live experiences of his previous reincarnations or his or her early childhood in order to find the reasons for present problems (Brian Weiss' hypnotherapy);
- spiritual-type techniques that rely on the therapist's ability to access information held by some form(s) of transcendental existence (ancestors, deities, angels, saints, guardian spirits)<sup>55</sup>, or by the client himself or herself (a previous reincarnation, the Higher-self, the aura or chakras) in order to counsel him or her on present problems (Ehara Hiroyuki's spiritual counselling);
- business-type techniques that are meant to teach the client methods to think positively and achieve success in his or her professional and personal life. (Neuro-linguistic programming - NLP);

<sup>55</sup> See section 3.4 for the methodological limitations in the use of such terms.

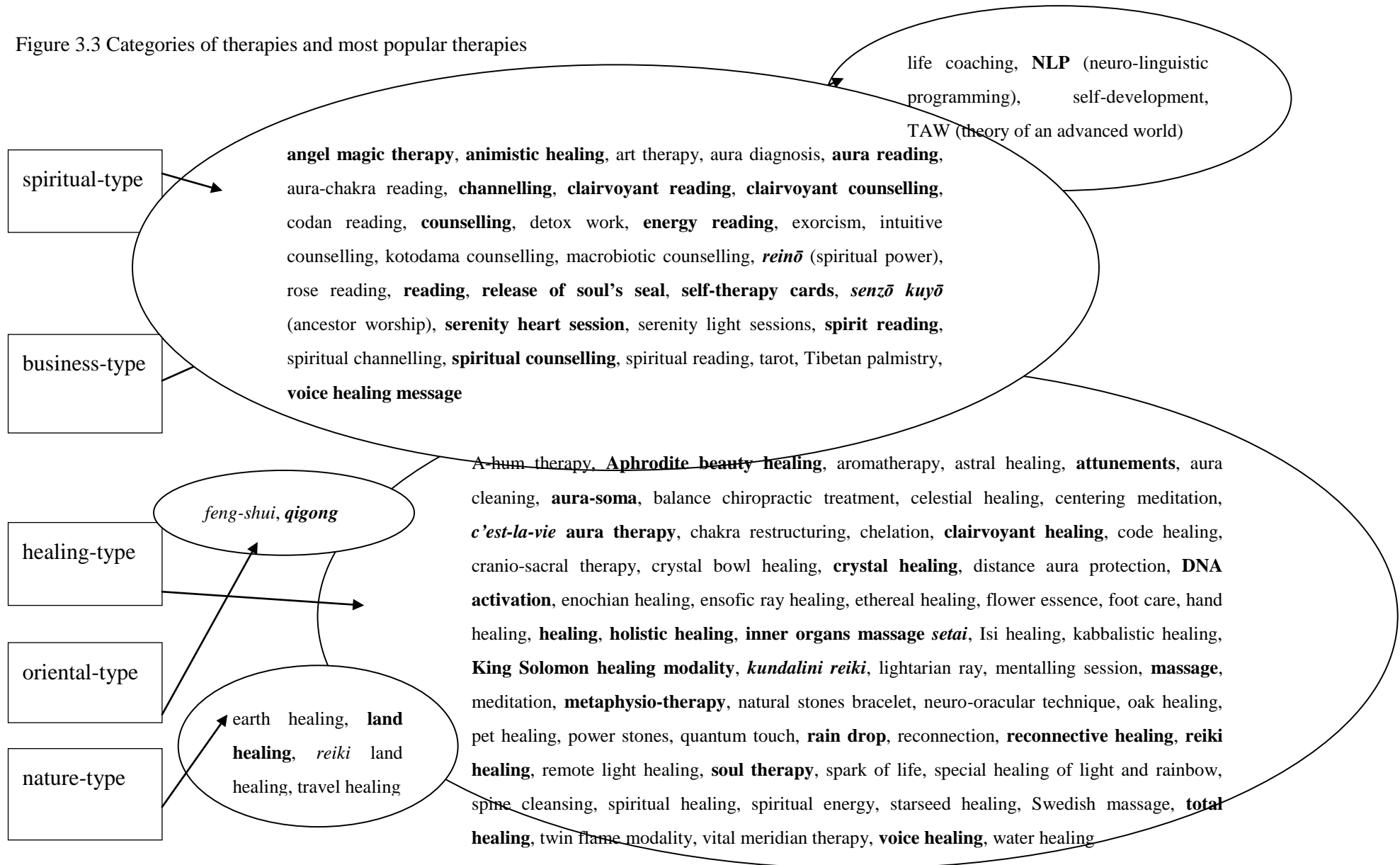
- healing-type techniques whose primary objective is to attend to both physiological and psychological problems through the use of a general concept of “energy” that is inserted into the body of the client either by direct or indirect contact with the therapist’s hands, or by the constant wearing on one’s body of some sort of object. (*reiki*);
- Oriental-type techniques which bear that name because they are usually imported from China. (*qigong*);
- Nature-type techniques that are meant to attend to the client’s issues by purifying the land (s)he lives on or reconnecting him or her through pilgrimages around locations considered “spiritual”. (land healing).

Looking at figure 3.3, in which I have marked in bold the therapies<sup>56</sup> deemed most in demand at the time of the interviews, an immediate observation can be made regarding the overwhelming popularity of healing-type techniques whose spread among the members of the new spirituality culture in Japan is relatively recent and attest a decrease in interest in the previously preferred spiritual-type therapies, a phenomenon which I will discuss in Chapter 5.

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<sup>56</sup> In Japanese, the vast majority of names of therapies are transliterated from English.

Figure 3.3 Categories of therapies and most popular therapies



The next set of questions concerned day-to-day affairs. Prices of sessions, for example, were reportedly decided by comparing with other salons and also with what the therapist felt appropriate to ask, while for some therapists even the financial and practical aspects of their daily practice had been entrusted to their higher self or guardian deity. As a result, and basing my analysis on the most popular sessions, there does not seem to be much variation: I calculated the average price per hour to be ¥10,375, very close to the median price of ¥10,000. Considering that the average length of session is approximately 90 minutes, a session with a spiritual therapist in present-day Japan would cost nearly ¥16,000. It is also worth noting that experience does not always mean higher prices: for example, a session with a *reinōsha*, such as Mr Matsuyama whose career spans more than three decades, costs ¥15,000 per hour, exactly the same price as a session with Ms Sakura, a spiritual counsellor who only started offering sessions, very similar in content to Mr Matsuyama's, five years ago. Costs, in fact, seem rather to reflect popularity, with, of course, a certain, often self-imposed upper limit that will be discussed in Chapter 4. My next question, therefore, concerned advertising. What do spiritual therapists do to attract clients?

The answer to this question revealed the most surprising fact about the spiritual business in Japan today: the overwhelming significance of *kuchikomi* (word of mouth). Indeed despite the increase of specialized publications and web portals featuring information on spiritual therapy salons, word of mouth counted on average for approximately 75 per cent of the advertising, with 33 of the practitioners interviewed claiming that over 90 per cent of their clients came after being introduced by someone else. However, considering the presence of the worldwide web and its major role in the expansion of the new spirituality culture around the world and particularly in Japan, the

concept of *kuchikomi* needs to be qualified. In fact I estimate that one-third of the 75 per cent mentioned above, consists of what was termed by my informants as ‘internet *kuchikomi*’: a client satisfied from his/her session with a spiritual therapist writes on his/her internet blog about the experience and recommends it to his/her regular readers. Spiritual therapists themselves may also take part in the production of internet *kuchikomi* on their own practice by promoting on their blogs their views on life and their therapies. Consequently, I always inquired about the internet activities of my informants, which I summarize below.

In Chapter 2, I have provided a sample of and explained my use of the internet websites when preparing my interviews with 62 out of the 68 spiritual therapists. To measure the impact on popularity of holding a homepage, I therefore also asked every interviewee about the daily access to their homepage. This turned out to be an average of approximately 85 visits per day, much lower than the average 295 daily access recorded by the 50 practitioners who also owned a blog. The importance of having a regularly updated blog (three times per week was the most common update rate) shows, in fact, both in numbers, 28 out of the 50 had a blog before opening a webpage and 15 opened both a blog and website at the same time, and in the words of most of the 50 practitioners who claimed that their blog is a necessary tool in their business because it allows the future client to get to know the practitioner whom he or she will trust with often very personal issues. The assistance of new internet technology makes the blogging activity even more significant for the practice of spiritual therapy: *Ameba*, which has recently become popular among spiritual therapists is an internet service providing free and easy tools to create a blog that has the advantage of offering daily popularity rates overall, and within the genre-specific categories (for example, ‘healing’

[iyashi] or ‘fortune-telling’ [uranai]) that the author has chosen to include his blog. This allows the spiritual therapist, not only to adapt his practice to the readers’ response, but it also increases the number of clients who choose to visit a therapist according to their place in the list of *Ameba*’s most popular blogs. And that is where internet *kuchikomi* finds its most contemporary meaning.

Figure 3.4 Sample of Ameba blog entry



**Total ranking**  
 Daily: 331,040 (has decreased from the previous day)  
 Monthly: 354,297 (has decreased from previous month)

**Ranking by genre**  
 Fortune-telling: 593 (has been decreasing)  
 Healing: 2,400 (has been decreasing)



In addition to the website and the blog, the spiritual therapists possess another method of regularly reaching future and past clients: the mail magazine. With the exception of Ms Okubo, who posts her monthly newsletter to the registered members' mail box, the other 20 practitioners writing a mail magazine on average fortnightly, use electronic mail to send directly to the inbox of the registered addresses updated news on the business side of their activities: information about new discounts on therapies, new dates for seminars, changes of blog or website addresses, and a recap of past events. Membership usually ranges between 100 and 400, but the number for at least one prolific practitioner who counts astrology among her specialities, exceeded 1,500 copies. Hereafter I provide a sample of the first page of the mail magazine of Ms Takashima's salon.

Figure 3.5 First section of Ms Takashima's newsletter

\* ◇ \* ◇ \*  
 + ◇ \* [Redacted] ng Magazine Vol.77 ◆ \* ◇ +  
 \* ◇ \* ◇ \*  
 この数日とても寒かったですね。これからはしばらく温かくなるそうです。  
 乾燥しますのでお肌の保湿に気をつけたり、花粉対策もしましょう!

☆ . \* . ☆ Contents ☆ . \* . ☆

1) 5月のご予約受付中  
 2) 受講者募集状況  
 3) ワンデイワークショップ1、2  
 4) スピリチュアルコラム: 『謙虚である事』

1)bookings for May are open  
 2)availability for classes  
 3)one-day workshops 1,2  
 4)spiritual column: 'modesty'

■■■■■■■■5月のご予約■■■■■■■■  
 5月のご予約受付中です。 4月は満員となりました。

■■■■■■■■受講者募集中の講座■■■■■■■■  
 ーーー○ クリスタルセラピー・ベーシック講座 ○ーーー  
 (2月25日から受講者募集開始)  
 水晶系(クォーツファミリー)を中心に、手に入れやすい色石も交えつつ、  
 鉱物の成り立ちや間違いやすい石、偽物本物について、  
 そして自分自身と向かい合いながら石を用いてヒーリングしていく方法等をご紹介します。  
 ヒーリングについて、そしてスピリチュアル/エネルギーワークに関して理解を深めたい方向けの講座  
 です。  
 メデ  
 開講  
 7月  
 ※※

Bookings for May are open. April is fully booked.  
 Because the reiki healer course and the program for awakening your inner goddess qualities are limited to one student per time, please consult the salon's booking status before you contact me with your preferred date and time

Despite the noted significance of word-of-mouth popularity in the spiritual business, therapists who can afford proper advertisements may choose to pay for an introductory article in a book or in a specialized magazine: eight of my informants were contacted through such publications, in this case two inventories in book format which were composed from advertisements of various lengths. Mr Yogino’s one-page article cost ¥50,000 (see figure 3.6), whereas the quarter-page description of Ms Kawasaki’s salon cost ¥30,000 and Ms Hirosaki’s life-story which spanned six pages was priced at ¥300,000.

Figure 3.6 Mr Yogino’s advertisement

*I can't take it anymore! 50 specialists of the soul who will relieve and revive your tired soul*

**最新決定版!!**

この疲れた心を  
休め、甦らせてくれる  
心の専門家  
**50人**

全国の50人の心の専門家を徹底紹介!!

**Mr Yogino**

先生

得意とする相談内容：恐怖症・神経症・対人関係・トラウマ・ストレス・うつ・心の不調や悩み全般  
 療 法：ヒプノセラピー全般（前世療法、多次元統合セラピー、インナーチャイルド、年齢逆行、回復療法）  
 手 法：対面  
 料 金：初回約3~4時間20000円（税込）、  
 2回目以降 2.5時間~最大4時間 18000円（税込）（延長料金は別いております）  
 営業時間：15:00~、14:30~、19:00~（開始時間相談）本館定休  
 住 所  
 電話・FA  
 メール  
 〒10700

ヒプノセラピーとは催眠療法のことです、クライアント自身が自分の過去や前世を見ることが出来る素晴らしい手法である。瞑想に近いとされる、いわば「半催眠」の状態で潜在意識にアクセスして、悩みや問題の根源を探り、解放することで気づきや癒しが出ていく。

「まずは長い時間をかけてじっくりと話を聞き、悩みを聴くことから始めます」とは言う、また場合によっては、セッション中に霊的な問題を取り除いたり、エネルギーの不調和も解決するという。先生はこのようなヨーロッパの手法を提供できる、日本では数少ないセラピストの一人である。

「できれば、まだ問題の軽いうちに、傷の浅い『未病』のうちにご自分の世界に触れていただきたいと思えます」と先生は呼びかける。

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Similar rates are also demanded for advertisements in specialized magazines such as *Trinity* or *Anemone*, but on the whole, the spiritual therapists who had used such services admitted to disappointment and considered never doing it again because they had seen no change in their popularity from these publications. This is a sign that *kuchikomi* remains the most effective method of attracting clients and, simultaneously, makes the spiritual business a financially, very unstable endeavour (see Chapter 4). Word of mouth-based activities define, and subsequently also limit the type of clientele to whose general characteristics I turn in the next section.

### **3.3. Consulting spiritual therapists**

The last part of my interview with spiritual therapists always concentrated on the clients, not just from a quantitative point of view (number, frequency of visits, telephone or face-to-face sessions) but also from a qualitative point of view: what are the most common reasons for visiting a spiritual therapist and by extension, what do the practitioners think about Japanese society and “the spiritual” in general?

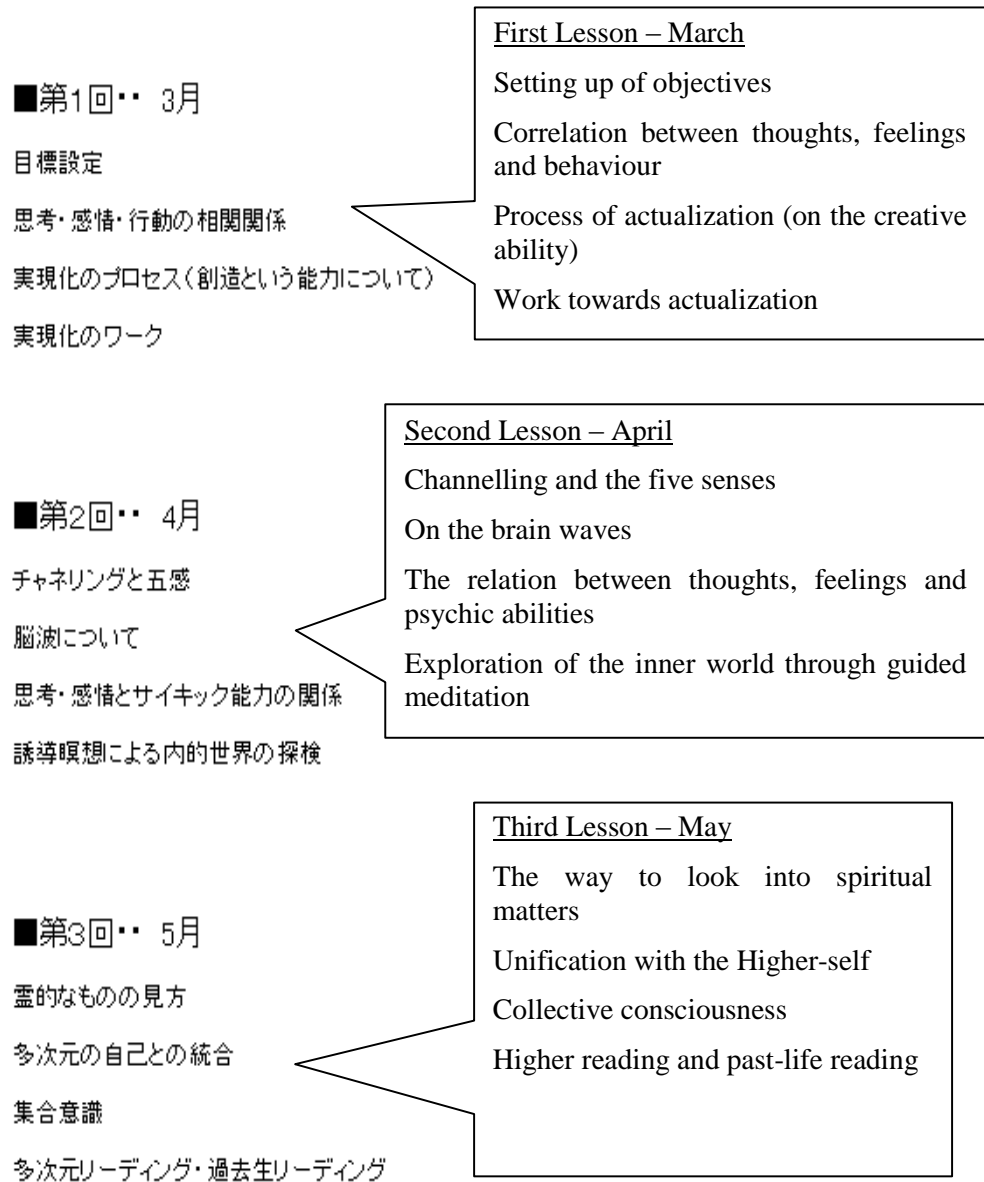
As with the gender of spiritual therapists, most Japanese seeking spiritual therapies are women: the average reported percentage of female clients is 80 per cent, with 38 out of the 68 informants estimating it to be more than 90. These are usually working (part-time or full-time) women coming to seek advice for a range of issues, from professional and relational matters (problems with existing boyfriend/husband or finding a boyfriend/husband are among the most frequent), to existential questions (‘is this job/life style the right one for me?’) and health issues. This last set of worries can be mainly divided into two groups: chronic physical pains or psychological distress often interpreted as depression. The same causality is found in male clients, although there were many fewer cases of love relationship issues. Samples of specific cases as

reported by the practitioners themselves or found on their websites will be analysed in more detail in Chapter 7, but, here, it is worth stressing one important factor that is revealed not only in the (undoubtedly subjective) perspectives of the practitioners, but also in the testimonies of the few clients whom I was able to interview on their own. This factor concerns the nature of these individuals who, in greater part, seem to be originally fans, already fluent in the concepts and practices of the new spirituality culture. This, in turn, becomes a key element in the explanation of the following phenomenon.

With 20 of the 68 practitioners reporting a 90 per cent rate of repeaters, unless we assume that the spiritual therapists are almost entirely unable to achieve what they advertise, it is evident that the satisfied clients tend to stay for more than one session. This tendency seems to be reinforced, not only by the offering of sessions on the phone (28 out of 68) and/or by e-mail (42 out of 68), but it is, I believe, the organisation of group activities that is most significant in increasing both the popularity and the proportion of repeaters. These group activities take the form of either discussions in which the spiritual therapist and the clients exchange their opinion on and experiences of various matters of “the spiritual” and beyond, or they are presented as seminars, workshops and lessons, which are firstly meant to teach the participant permanent methods of self-therapy to avoid future problems, and which have subsequently developed into accreditation courses for aspiring professionals. Forty-four out of the 68 informants organised such group activities at an average frequency of four per month. Prices of course vary, from ¥3,000 for a tea party to the ¥756,000 that Ms Kawamura asks for her 18-day spiritual massage course. In Figure 3.7 below I provide an example of a 10-day channelling course taught by Ms Fumada and costing ¥367,500 (¥52,500 for

preparatory textbooks and ¥31,500 per class). At the time of the interview, 20 students were registered on what is Ms Fumada’s most popular group activity.

Figure 3.7 Ms Fumada’s channelling course contents



■第4回・・・ 6月

魂の旅 なぜ地上に降りてくるのか

時間の概念

トラウマ、インナーチャイルドの考察と癒し

高次の周波数にアクセスするワーク

Fourth Lesson – June

The soul's travel: why does it come down to earth?

The concept of time

Aspects and healing of trauma and inner child

Practice to access higher frequencies

■第5回・・・ 7月

今生のテーマ 両親・兄弟姉妹という存在について

家族・家系の集合意識

浄霊とはどのようなことか？

浄霊ワーク

Fifth Lesson – July

This life's themes: on the existence of parents and siblings

The collective consciousness of the family and lineage

What is exorcism?

Practice of exorcism

August: holidays

■8月はお休みです

■第6回・・・ 9月

思考パターン・思いグセについて

魂の設計図を書き直す(ブループリントの再構成)

限界を再設定するワーク

Sixth Lesson – September

On patterns of thought and bad habits

Rewriting soul's design (reconfiguration of the blueprint)

Practice to reset one's limits

■第7回・・・ 10月

エンパス(共感能力)について  
 プロテクションの意義  
 境界線(バンダリ)とは何か  
 白魔術によるプロテクション

Seventh Lesson – October

On empathy  
 The significance of protection  
 What is the border line (*bandari*)  
 Protection by white magic

■第8回・・・ 11月

投影  
 エネルギー上でみる人間関係  
 人間関係を癒す意義  
 高次の存在(天使、ガイドなど)との関係  
 「ゆだねる」というパワー

Eighth Lesson – November

Projection  
 Human relations seen through energy  
 The meaning of healing human relations  
 Relations with higher beings (angels, guides etc)  
 The power to ‘entrust’

■第9回・・・ 12月

アバんだンス(富と豊かさ)について  
 お金というエネルギー  
 与えること・受け取ること  
 豊かさに関する癒し

Ninth Lesson – October

On Abundance (prosperity and affluence)  
 The energy called ‘money’  
 Giving and receiving  
 Healing related to affluence

■第10回・・・ 1月

目標を振り返る  
 自己実現の過程  
 可能性、無限大という概念  
 愛を広げる

Tenth Lesson – October

Review one’s objectives  
 The process of self-actualization  
 The concepts of opportunity and infinity  
 Spreading love

The longer their experience, therefore, the more the spiritual therapists are inclined to share their own view of the “proper” spiritual therapy and subsequently of the “proper” way to live. The most successful among them manage to combine both individual sessions and taught seminars, with the option of participating in larger events

showcasing spiritual therapies such as the ‘spiritual market’ (popularly known as *spima*). Consequently, full time practitioners can become very busy: the average number of clients per week was eight, with half of the interviewees receiving four or less customers in the same span of time. In fact, depending on the type of therapy, conducting more than two or three sessions per day was deemed as overwork and even the 20 full-time therapists who were renting their salons (such as Ms Fumada above) generally avoided relying entirely on one-to-one activities.

The next question that usually led to an inquiry about the opinion of the practitioner on Japanese society was the age of the clients: although mid-twenties to mid-fifties was confirmed to be the age span for 99 per cent of the Japanese interested in spiritual therapies, further clarification revealed that the vast majority are actually between their late twenties and late thirties. Seventeen of the 68 practitioners, in fact, claimed that their entire clientele is composed of Japanese in their thirties, a phenomenon they often attributed to that age span corresponding to a period of change (*tenkai*), sometimes leading the individual to an early mid-life crisis both at the workplace and at home. Bad-tempered boss, cheating husband, lazy children, bullying mother-in-law were among the most common reasons for seeking the help of a spiritual therapist who often linked those events to existing psychosomatic pains. The holistic approach to illness causality, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is also observed in the occulture of the West. Asked about their opinion on such widespread occurrences, however, the Japanese spiritual therapists often determined that they were due to factors specific to Japanese society and the Japanese self requiring methods adapted to those specificities. This tendency to consider Japan as a unique case will be further explored in Chapter 6, but, here, I shall examine a few representative examples.



Ms Kikuko, to whom I referred in the first section as a fan of the occult who eventually made her hobby a profession, remembered during our discussion the case of a woman coming for therapy because of stress and depression:

She was an artist living in New York, with a very open character, but she was obsessed with people talking behind her back or thinking badly of her. I read her aura, saw the real person and told her that she had a passive attitude (*ukemi*) and that she was not building on her past mistakes. You see, Japanese always think that to be intelligent is to avoid standing out. They try to do what they want without making a fuss or being remarked upon. Japanese women, particularly, wish to become house-wives, have kids and stay at home. That's it. That's the kind of people who come to me. So I help them remember where their true happiness is.<sup>57</sup>

Ms Saeda, expressing another common idea held by the spiritual therapists interviewed, believes that the Japanese did not traditionally conform to Ms Kikuko's description, but they became so because of the influence of American individualistic ideals spread in the immediate post-war period. Hence, she criticized this last decade's surge of Western spiritual teachers and the inappropriateness of their methods, advancing otherwise paradoxical arguments such as the one below:

Foreign teachers say 'remove your ego', 'concentrate on the heart, not the head', but Japanese should do exactly the opposite. They need to think about themselves, and they need also to stop respecting those teachers without questioning them. The problem with the Japanese is their extreme dependence which pushes them to do exactly what they are told to do in the spiritualist books and seminars.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Interview of 10 June 2009.

<sup>58</sup> Interview of 7 August 2009.

This last comment of the contemporary spiritual therapists of Japan leads to another significant aspect of their clientele which explains previous observations such as the recent popularity of accreditation courses and the important percentage of repeaters. Indeed, it was reported by the majority of my informants that in the last three years there has been a sudden increase of individuals wishing to become professionals themselves, and therefore sessions tend sometimes to provide the opportunity for the client to copy their teachers or at least be inspired by them. This proportion of the clientele was estimated to be 30 to 40 per cent, but it was predicted that it would grow, as for several practitioners it already constituted 70 per cent of their cases. Consequently, I deemed it necessary to ask about the reasons for this recent interest in entering the spiritual business and found through the therapists' responses an easy way to pursue my line of inquiry about the spiritual therapists' opinion of what "the spiritual" means and about the role played by Ehara Hiroyuki in its popularisation.

The recent increase of aspiring spiritual therapists was usually given a two-fold explanation, with interviewees occasionally emphasizing one or the other side of it. For some, it was the opportunity to make a good living out of becoming a therapist that encouraged these newcomers to attend seminars and regularly visit established practitioners. Spiritual therapy, particularly for middle-aged women, is considered a business opportunity; this phenomenon with all that it implies for Japanese society today will be further explored in Chapter 7. For the remaining practitioners, the Japanese are finally awakening to the truth and reality of an invisible world (*me ni mienai sekai*), liberating themselves from the constraints of pragmatism and rationalism, joining the rest of the population heading towards Ascension, and embracing their past as an 'inherently spiritual people'. This last expression was also the main reason given

for the popularity of “the spiritual” in Japan today. The following answer by Ms Murayama was a typical reaction:

I think that Japanese have easily accepted the spiritual because of four factors. First, their high sense of tolerance (*kanyō*), secondly, the absence of a religious basis, thirdly the existing belief in reincarnation, and finally, considering our faith in the myriads of deities (*yaoyorozu no kami*<sup>59</sup>), because they are very spiritual.<sup>60</sup>

The instigator of this spiritual (re)turn was unanimously believed to be Ehara Hiroyuki, the spiritual counsellor whose television show, *The Fountain of Aura*, by the time I started my interviews, had just left the regular schedule, bowing to a low audience rating. For all my informants, however, Ehara’s celebrity, in the span of a few years, made previously unknown concepts such as ‘aura’ and ‘guardian spirit’ (*shugorei*), common vocabulary that ‘even a *salaryman* (company employee) understands’, claimed Ms Sakura, a young professional who opened her salon in 2008. Ms Sakura is, in fact, one of the few cases who admitted having decided to become a professional after watching Ehara’s programme.

It was the time when *ōra no izumi* was scheduled around midnight, and the more I was watching the more I realized that the powers I had experienced during childhood were *reishi* (spirit vision). If it wasn’t for him (Ehara), I wouldn’t be sitting here now.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> 八百万の神 in Japanese, the online encyclopaedia of Shinto notes that ‘the term Shinto is commonly associated with the expression “eighty myriads of *kami*”, indicating the truly immense number of such *kami* found in the religion and suggesting the obvious reason why Shinto is usually referred to as a “polytheistic” belief system.’

(see <http://eos.kokugakuin.ac.jp/modules/xwords/entry.php?entryID=235>, visited 25 February 2010)

<sup>60</sup> Interview of 31 August 2009.

<sup>61</sup> Interview of 1 September 2009.

Nevertheless, the majority of the practitioners interviewed considered themselves different, often better suited to solving their clients' problems than Ehara Hiroyuki. Several arguments supported this final question of my interview and were always linked to what spiritual therapy should be about. From the practical side, Ehara was thought to be too direct in telling people what they ought or ought not to do. From a "spiritual" side, Ehara's powers were deemed to be limited to reporting information from the "invisible world" and did not extend to healing. By the end of 2009, Ehara Hiroyuki had become an important, yet outdated, stepping stone in the development of Japan's spirituality therapies, which now needed to lose their occult, entertainment-like character and join the ranks of alternative therapies which claimed a growing role in the health-seeking choices of contemporary Japanese.

### **3.4. Far from perfect**

The interviews with the spiritual therapists comprise the main part of my data, which in effect means that limitations regarding access to and the content of this information could lead to shortcomings in my arguments for the following reasons.

Firstly, the sample cannot be argued to be representative, nor was it ever intended to be so. Even though I previously noted that the response rate was generally good (approximately one third), these positive answers may just correspond to one type of open-minded, yet opportunistic practitioner, in other words spiritual therapists who, while being curious about the outcome of an interview, saw it also as a chance for them to learn and possibly to improve their business. Although the number of negative answers was limited (only 17), they indicate the type of individuals I may have missed

in my study. Four of the 16 therapists who refused to be interviewed clearly stated that they were too busy, which, if not corresponding to reality, could have just been an excuse hiding a series of other reasons that may be expressed in the remaining 15 negative answers. Three practitioners claimed that they concentrate only on healing and other activities related to spiritual therapy and therefore do not accept interviews. Instead, one of them suggested that I should read her book<sup>62</sup> and another one offered to conduct on me a trial session costing ¥20,000<sup>63</sup>. A few therapists (4) provided more precise reasons: no face-to-face interview<sup>64</sup>, protection of privacy<sup>65</sup>, cancellation because of family emergency<sup>66</sup>, ‘there is no particular reason; it’s just my feeling’<sup>67</sup>.

The next six communications did not strictly refuse my request, but they never replied to my second message in which I was thanking the therapists for their original agreement to be interviewed and I was trying to set up a day and time for the discussion to take place<sup>68</sup>. Apart from simple forgetfulness, I can only think that a sudden change of mind occurred, but I cannot speculate as to the cause. I have to note, however, that four of these exchanges took place after my conference abstract on nationalistic *reinōsha* was made available on the internet at the beginning of May (see end of Chapter 2), and that one of these six communications that remained unanswered, was in

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<sup>62</sup> Electronic communication of 19 August 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Electronic communication of 6 August 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Electronic communication of 18 August 2009.

<sup>65</sup> Electronic communication of 5 June 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Electronic communication of 20 March 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Electronic communication of 9 April 2009.

<sup>68</sup> Electronic communications of 13 April, 14 April, 5 May, 5 June, 9 June, 18 August 2009.

fact clarifying my position regarding “the spiritual” as an objective researcher, a position that may not have seemed reliable or trustworthy enough to the addressee.

Finally, the last negative answer<sup>69</sup> was unique in providing the author’s criticism on every section of my original letter (see appendix 1) after noting that he had temporarily stopped his business and therefore could not reply to my request. Here, I summarize the main points of Mr Masayuki, who, according to the profile posted on his website, is 38-years old and has been trained in hypnotherapy, channelling and alternative counselling.

I do not think that I possess any ability or that I have contributed to helping people (...) My objective is to be able to simply explain to people the mechanism of “worrying”, but there is no academic or medical basis to what I am doing (...) I just tell people what I felt from listening to their story (...) It is not the type of counselling in which I suggest what the client should do (...) I think people should be left to decide about their own future and that endeavour needs training and cycles of failure and success (...) There are different ways to achieve psychological relief and it all depends on what the individual chooses (...) As for my opinion on Japanese society, I think you should trust what you, yourself have seen (...) Foreigners would be more interested in your research.

Mr Masayuki expresses two general concepts, one deriving from the other, that spiritual therapists have been developing over the years (see Chapter 6 for details): the clause of non-responsibility towards the consequences of one’s therapy, which has expanded from the typical New Age belief that only individual decision-making matters. My request for an interview therefore ultimately was asking the therapist to take a certain responsibility towards his or her actions since agreeing to meet me may have been interpreted by some practitioners as agreeing to the statements I was making in my letter. Whereas for certain individuals my acknowledgement of their contribution

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<sup>69</sup> Electronic communication of 4 May 2009.

to the psychological relief of the Japanese, of their comparability to their Western counterparts, and therefore my interest in what they were doing may have acted as an incentive to talk with me, for others these same assumptions may have made them wary as to the importance which I was attributing to their practice.

Secondly, from a general point of view, I can neither claim that the narratives I collected report objectively the reality that they seek to represent, nor that my note-taking was as efficient as a recording of the same conversation would have been if it had been allowed. Most of the information which I sought required from the interviewees a combination of memory (reason for entering the spiritual, cases of clients, training seminars attended) and estimation (website/blog access, age and number of clients, other costs) that might lack accuracy. To minimize the probability of misinformation, I tried to verify the practitioners' stories using the internet and specialized magazines, such as *Star People*, *Trinity*, *Therapy All Guide*. This was particularly effective in the case of the spiritual teachers, courses and books said to have been major inspirations for the profession, and for which the details could mostly be found using the above methods. The spiritual therapists' refusal to be recorded for privacy reasons, (and, for many, for fear their ideas could be stolen and used by other practitioners) obliged me to take notes in English. The Japanese language was not chosen for reasons of practicality and speed, and because, as previously warned by a young Japanese researcher studying in a similar field, the interviewees may have adapted their answers according to the keywords I would have written in my notebook. Even in English, I adopted the practice of writing all the time whether the conversation was relevant or not, in order to avoid the person in front of me spotting what interested me most. This of course forced me to summarize much of the conversation (with

clarifying notes added after the interview) and only keep narratives of what at the time I considered significant to copy in its original phrasing. I have to say however that my language ability never failed me and that I always tried to inquire about unknown words.

However, and this is the third reason as to why the interviews took the format described earlier, I could not constantly ask about everything. I could not adopt the student-type behaviour I had followed, for example, during my two-day visit at the headquarters of Ōmoto where the public relations staff guided me and the rest of the visiting research group from Kokugakuin University through the rituals and concepts of one of the first new religions to appear in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the case of the spiritual therapists, ignorance often meant that I was an outsider and as such that I was prone to hold a negative stance towards “the spiritual”. In fact, more than the reason for studying them, the therapists always deemed it more important to ask me if they were the first I had ever met, to which I hurriedly responded with an approximate number of my previous interviews.

Consequently, I entered a vicious circle in which the more interviews I obtained the more in-depth discussions I could have with the next practitioner, but the more in-depth the interview was, the more new concepts were introduced to me. Of course, in between interviews it became necessary to verify the meaning of such concepts, but I could never compete with fans of this occulture who have spent several years (if not decades) reading about “spiritual” themes. Questioning and competition based on knowledge about Japanese occultural subjects were also not a good idea for the reasons I explained in Chapter 2 (section 2.2): overly specific questions could seem as if I was trying to copy the therapists’ ideas (and that is, for free), whereas overly knowledgeable



questions would make it appear that I knew more than them and therefore could unbalance the power relationship they were used to during one-to-one sessions with their clients. Finally, several practitioners simply refused to discuss the theories behind their practice because they believed that I had to be an initiate to be trusted. This was particularly the case with the 11 out of 68 therapists who had joined the Rocky Mountain Mystery School, which I estimate to be the largest “spiritual academy” today in Japan (see Chapter 4 for details).

Considering the above, I need to note in conclusion that the quality and quantity of information I possess today on these 68 therapists is far from constant: it all depended on my skilful balance between knowledgeable fan and inquiring researcher, on the interviewee’s will and memory to provide satisfying answers, and it even depended on the occasion. Understandably, discussions in coffee shops could not be as relaxed as when meeting in the therapist’s salon. I still remember one of these instances when I had been asked to wait in front of a shopping mall near Shibuya station in central Tokyo on Sunday afternoon, one of the busiest places particularly at that time. Ms Hamata wished to have the interview inside a cramped coffee shop on the second floor of that shopping mall, where customers had to be careful not to hit the person at the next table when lifting their coffee cups. This atmosphere turned the discussion about Ms Hamata’s past occupation as a club hostess, which Ms Hamata was already not very willing to recollect, into an even greater challenge. In other circumstances, a preliminary questionnaire posted by e-mail could have arguably, improved my survey, but as I mentioned in section 2.2, I, first did not want the therapists to prepare ahead of my visit with already made, “unnatural” answers (some may have even given up on

meeting me after having seen the questions), and, second, I did not know what they would do with that questionnaire.

Despite all this, however, the attempt to use my presence to boost their popularity could not always be controlled. I have mentioned that this was the main reason for choosing to interview every therapist only once. Yet I cannot guarantee that even that occasion did not interfere with both their word-of-mouth popularity and the way they and their entourage view spiritual therapy today. Hereafter, I provide an example of a blog entry posted by a therapist on the day I interviewed him. I have to note that, except for the encircled paragraph, none of what he writes was ever mentioned or suggested in the interview.

Figure 3.8 Therapist's blog entry related to my interview

プロフィール



子供のころから自覚していた霊能力を本格的に働いて、今は高次元エネルギーのアチューンメントやスピリチュアルカウンセリングを行うヒーラーとして活動しています。

最新記事

- 【お知らせ】2010年2月いっぱい、パラオコいます (03/01)
- 【レベル2】3/9(火)10:00~17:00にワークショップやります@Skype (02/28)
- 自分の可能性の確信のための試行錯誤から卒業する (02/21)

主婦がヒーラーに憧れる理由

日本人の精神世界について研究している博士課程の(イギリス人である)学生さんから取材を申し込まれ、応じました。

その方がイギリス人だったからか、最近の日本のスピリチュアル・ヒーリングを巡る世相について「日本人であるにも関わらず、海外の創始者のメソッドを何の抵抗もなく取り入れて活用している人が多くて特徴的だ、にわかには信じ難い」と感心しておられました。

(どうやら、自分以外の国のメソッドを輸入することに対しては、日本以外の国の人からすればもっと抵抗を感じるのが当然。慎重になったり、その輸入によって自国の文化に悪影響を与えないかどうか配慮することでした。たしかに日本人って、そういうことぜんぜん考えないでさくさく輸入して使いこなしますよね)

さて本題ですが。

30~50代といった中高年の専業主婦層が、プロのヒーラーになることここまでする熱心な国はほかどこを見ない、とその学生さんは自分自身のリサーチ結果に驚いていました。

イギリス人である彼からすると、職業というのは、あらかじめ学生時代などからその人のなかで志望する気持ちがあって、それに沿った教育を受けて就くものだという意識が強いようです。

だから、自分が志向した職業以外の職業になろうとする気持ちが芽生えること自体、ありえないことだと感じるようでした。特に中高年になってから未経験の職業にチャレンジしようとする気持ちを新たに芽生えさせる神経が、うまく理解できないとのこと。ましてやそれが、何十年も主婦として、職業と無縁の人生を送ってきたなら尚更。ヒーラーになりたいのなら、若い頃から志向してもよさそうなものだし、結婚して主婦になるという選択をしたなら、それはそれで主婦を貫くことに迷いを感じる理由はないだろう、と。

あー、西欧の人ってのはそういうふう考えるのかー、と思考パターンの国民性の違いのようなものを感じつつ、私は以下のように答えました。

「まず、現在、中高年の年齢にいる人たちが若かった頃には、現在普及しているような洗練されたヒーリングメソッドは確立されていなかったし、高次元エネルギーや超感覚という概念についての社会的認知度も今とは比べ物にならないほど低かった。だから、内心、ヒーラーへの志向性を秘めた人であっても、それが顕在化せず潜在的なまま結婚→主婦という経歴を辿るのが一般的だったのではないゆえ。

*a British doctoral student researching about the world of the spiritual came to interview me*

*he found it difficult to believe that even though we are Japanese we easily accept and use foreign methods of spiritual healing*

*he thought it impossible for someone, particularly a housewife, to suddenly, in mid-life, start a career as a spiritual healer.*

*while feeling the difference of our nationalities in this type of thinking, I answered as follows*

*(first reason for housewives wanting to become professional therapists: the popularisation of healing).*

● 信念は大事 (02/20)

● インテラクターが増えたら良いんだけど？ (02/18)

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カテゴリ

ヒーリング全般 (124)

シークヒーリング (169)

セラフィムブループリント (17)

レビュー (24)

スピリチュアル (31)

リカセーション (31)

エンターテインメント (10)

健康・生活 (59)

文化・芸術 (8)

? (4)

未分類 (9)

パラオ (0)

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月別アーカイブ

● 2010/03 (1)

● 2010/02 (14)

● 2010/01 (39)

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● 2009/12 (26)

● 2009/11 (39)

● 2009/10 (64)

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● 2009/09 (50)

● 2009/08 (49)

● 2009/07 (31)

● 2009/06 (51)

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次に、主婦が働きたいという願望は、ヒーラー志望者だけに限らず主婦層全体を見ても、目立つ傾向だ。特に、夫が養われていることで劣等感を抱く人——自分自身の力で金を稼いで社会で立派に自立して生きていける人間なのだと思いたい人がまだそれをしたことがない人——に、就労願望が強い人が多い。

さらに、いと、中高年で女性で主婦歴が長い(=キャリアのブランクが長い)という属性を考えた場合、どんな職種であっても、企業に採用されて働かせてもらえる可能性が極端に低い。その意味でヒーラーは、年齢制限や国家資格などの制約を受けない点で、いつからでも誰でも目指せるという特徴がある。

また、業種の性質を考えた場合、ヒーリングという業種は、単に売上のために顧客にとって不必要な商品を売つける会社の営業などと比べると、『世の中の役に立っている感/人助けができていいる感]が大きいので、精神的に安らぎと働き甲斐、こいては生き甲斐を感じやすいのではないかと。

学生さん「おおー！」と、意外な発見をしたときのような声をあげて熱心にメモしてくださっていました。

自分でも話し終え、目指そうと思いつけ、と、自分で言ったことに対して熱く(自分の頭の中だけでもうまく)えようと脳が働かなか整理されていたというこのな

たしかに、ヒーラーというの、か、に売上倍増のために営業・勧誘・宣伝するのが必ずしも望ましいワケではない業種ですね。

だから、それ一本でなんとしても食わねばならない、という状況の人よりは、生活は別の手段(=夫の稼ぎ)で安定している主婦の方が、空いた時間に(あくまでプロとしての姿勢と力量をもって)行うのもしる適しているような気がします。

今はインターネットという超・強力な武器があります。(なんなら無料で使えるブログサービスでもよいので)自分の公式ヒーリングサイトを立ち上げるだけで、世界じゅうに対してヒーラーとしての自分の存在を知らしめることが可能になる時代です。

欲や金に走るのではなく、あくまで真摯にヒーリングの修練を積み、乞われたときこそプロとしての対価はきちりもらってセッションに応じる(お金をもらったまうが無料でもやるより良い理由は、このブログでもたびたび書いてきましたし、まだ書ききれないほどあります)。

そして、主婦としての義務も怠らず、うまく二足の草鞋を履き分ける。

なんか、そういうの、カッコいいじゃないですか。

(second reason: housewives want to contribute to society like their husbands do)

(third reason: housewives have a very low chance of finding a job in industry, but there is no age limit or national qualifications necessary to become a healer)

(fourth reason: the feeling of doing something good that the profession of spiritual therapy offers in contrast with other services)

the student, surprised, uttered an "oooo" and took notes eagerly.

Mr Takahashi's posting exemplifies the common tendency among spiritual therapists of trying to show to their readers and clients that they always keep the upper hand in any situation and that their insight is usually stronger than that of the average person. To a certain extent, in this line of work which can be summarized by the single

sentence “giving advice”, it would seem natural that a successful therapist should manifest his or her skills 24 hours per day and not just during a session. This of course relates to the nature of this particular activity (a subject developed throughout the following chapters) as, for example, Mr Ushimoto’s words attest: ‘If a spiritual healer is not healthy himself, he would have no clients. What is the point of being a healer if you can’t heal yourself?’

Ultimately, however, the competitiveness, secrecy and certain suspicion towards a researcher they meet for the first time is, I believe, connected to a significant degree to the socio-cultural environment in which the Japanese spiritual therapists train and work. As will be shown in the following chapters, the Aum affair (see Chapter 1) and the subsequently tainted image attributed to religions in Japan, has created a climate in which the spiritual therapists find themselves constantly protecting their practice against accusations which they believe to be unrelated to the new spirituality culture. This particular social feature of contemporary Japanese society, together with the cultural underpinnings, such as reciprocity, that may explain the wish of many Japanese therapists to gain as much from me as I gained from them, turn what I have called limitations in my methodology into, in fact, ethnographic material enriching the arguments developed in this thesis.

### **3.5 Conclusion: results out of fuzziness**

When in the spring of 2010 I returned briefly to Japan to present some of my findings in front of a small audience of the Department of Religious Studies at Taishō University, I found myself, at the end of my presentation, bombarded with questions, not on the theories I had been prepared to defend, but on the methodology that had allowed me access to so many spiritual therapists. Later, Professor Yumiyama Tatsuya, who has

published extensively on the sociology of spirituality in Japan (see co-edited book of the same title) and who had invited me to present my research at his institution, confessed that he and his colleagues had been greatly stimulated by my presentation (*ōi ni shigeki o ukemashita*) and that they believed it was the first time someone had ever interviewed so many practitioners of this type. I had heard this comment before from my supervisor in Japan, Professor Ikegami Yoshimasa, and from other Japanese researchers and so it had been my conviction, as suggested in the publications and later confirmed by my informants, that spiritual therapists in Japan had never consistently been the subject of a study until now. “The spiritual” had been examined as it manifested itself in the media and publishing world, self-help groups and, to a certain extent, new religious movements, but no one had approached the most significant *prosumers* of this phenomenon: the independent practitioners themselves. This was the case in Japan, but what about in the West?

In the *Handbook of New Age*, Liselotte Frisk (2007) summarizes and discusses the quantitative studies of the New Age that have been undertaken in the Western hemisphere and emphasizes, among others, two major fields where improvement is necessary and to which my study may comprise a modest contribution.

Firstly, noting the significant number of surveys distributed to individuals identified as New Age-oriented (there are seven such studies based on questionnaires, with the largest sample size being that of Stuart Rose at 908 respondents [2005]), Frisk notes the weakness of all such research in qualifying the level of engagement of the participants in the New Age (2007, 119). By targeting only spiritual therapists, the survey informing my argument in this thesis, avoids this bias of engagement considering that the sample is made entirely of fully fledged New Agers (in Western

setting-terms). Secondly, and subsequently, this study I believe also addresses Frisk's next remark:

A subculture related to New Age, where different levels of engagement are visible, and where more research is definitely needed, is the area of alternative and holistic therapies. More work needs to be done on the different possibilities of attitude and perspective which are possible for an individual here, the differences and similarities between different therapies, and the potential relation to New Age. (ibid, 120)

Whereas quantitative conclusions may be drawn from the data gathered (as shown in this chapter), I am convinced that phenomena such as “the spiritual” in Japan, or the New Age in the West, are best examined through a qualitative discussion, mainly because of their nature that is still best described by Paul Heelas' concept of ‘*lingua franca*’. Indeed, Heelas rightly argues that, although on a superficial level it just looks like a random mix of beliefs and practices from various and often different origins, the New Age Movement (and subsequently the encompassing occulture or new spirituality culture in which I have placed the spiritual therapists), is bound by a common language, a *lingua franca*. This *lingua franca* expresses the shared idea that a person is in essence “spiritual” (see chapter 6 for further discussions on the ideology of the Japanese occulture) but this belief is almost never manifested in the same wording or practice.

What I am trying to argue here is that no questionnaire, no matter how rich in possible choices, can assure a faithful representation of activities said to belong to the new spirituality culture. Frisk simply testifies to this, bringing the example of questions about belief in God, which from survey to survey always shows different rates due to the different, almost on an individual level, understandings of the concept of God among New Agers (ibid, 116). Hence, the open-ended approach not only to interviews,

but also to a methodology in general in the field of studies on the new spirituality culture should be considered a pre-requisite in order to understand the “open-ended” approach to life of those under investigation. “Jobbing”, as mentioned in chapter 2, could be viewed as an open-ended methodology, and the same can be said for the sympathetically detached position, also discussed in the previous chapter, which I attempted to hold. This is not just an idealistic notion that could arguably be claimed in any academic field of inquiry, but a necessary stance, for, I believe, the phenomenon studied here can be best examined in the difficulties encountered in order to understand its “fuzziness” through the stories of as many of its participants as possible.



## **Chapter 4: The Spiritual Business**

This chapter will look into the business side of the spiritual therapists' activities, from the seminars and schools teaching techniques and selling credentials for becoming a professional spiritual therapist, to the costs of setting up a salon and the prices of spiritual therapy sessions and by-products of the spiritual business. The objective is to provide a more detailed view of the spiritual business showing the entire spectrum (from unlawful and even dangerous practices to innocent hobbies) of the different agents and products involved in order to evaluate the role of money-making in this sector. In this regard, the last section of this chapter, in which I investigate the unstable nature of this business and the opinions of the spiritual therapists of their profession, promises to be particularly illuminating as to what money really means in this sector.

Every time I took the bus during my stay in Japan to Mitaka train station in the western suburbs of Tokyo, I found myself impatiently waiting to see the reactions of the rest of the passengers to the announcement at the penultimate stop which was always accompanied by a particularly interesting advertisement: 'The next stop is Musashino Police Station. Worrying about your life? Your future? Visit the fortune-telling salon above the MUFG bank, a two-minute walk from the south exit of the station'. As always, I looked around me trying to catch a hint of interest in what had just been announced, or even a short comment on the pros and cons of that particular divination salon or fortune-telling in general. But to no avail. The truth is that divination services in Japan have been thriving despite the economic crisis, attacks on fraudulent

behaviour<sup>70</sup> or recent anti-religious sentiment; they are part of everyday life and perhaps they are less distinctive than a decade ago, when it was observed that ‘fortune-telling in all its diverse manifestations comprises a distinct culture of its own’ (Suzuki, 1995, 249).

In 2008, the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> places of the best-sellers’ list published by the *All Japan Magazine and Book Publisher’s and Editor’s Association* were occupied by a series of books on personality analysis according to blood type, with the one dedicated to type B (which, incidentally, includes a minority of Japanese) having sold the most copies: one million six thousand<sup>71</sup>. Monthly magazines specializing in divination and spiritual therapy subjects, such as *Koiunreki* and *Misty*, which hit the stores ten and fifteen years ago respectively, may have dropped in sales from 520,000 copies in 2004 to 340,000 copies in 2008 according to the same report (ibid, 175). However, the number of *mook* (a Japanese word made from the combination of magazine and book, to indicate a thematic serialized publication the size of a magazine) dealing with the same interests has increased to 54, a 117 per cent rise from 2007 (ibid, 216), demonstrating that the increased size of informed readership has become more selective, preferring to choose to read about this or that specific divination technique, for example, rather than buying a generalized publication.

A recent article in the *The Japan Times* reported that ‘Zappalas Inc., which operates Japan’s largest network of fortune-telling websites and mobile content, said

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<sup>70</sup> The National Network of Lawyers against the Spiritual Sales (*Zenkoku reikan shōhō taisaku bengoshi renrakukai*) reports on its website that, from its establishment in 1987 to the year 2008, it has dealt with 30,549 claims of fraud accounting for approximately ¥107 billion of damages (see [http://www1k.mesh.ne.jp/reikan/madoguchi\\_higai.htm](http://www1k.mesh.ne.jp/reikan/madoguchi_higai.htm), visited on 22 April 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Shadan hōjin zenkoku shuppan kyōkai shuppan kagaku kenkyūsho (2009, 89).

membership on its fortune-telling sites has been steadily increasing over the years, reaching 1.47 million as of January<sup>7</sup>, with the mobile fortune-telling market having increased from ¥10.3 billion in 2004 to ¥18.2 billion in 2007 (Martin, 2009).

The aforementioned non-face-to-face divination services in present-day Japan are just the tip of the iceberg that was recently called “spiritual business” and which was fiercely criticised by Sakurai Yoshihide in a recent publication, *Spirits and Cash* (see section 1.1). Sakurai is not however to blame for his stance. As a strong advocate of the anti-cult movement in Japan which has been growing year on year since the Aum incident in 1995, Sakurai, at a November 2009 speech at Komazawa University, seemed to be most worried about the exploitation of the consumer interest of young Japanese in non-rational beliefs and practices by money-making spiritual therapies which he projects as another facet of the religious organisations he has been criticizing for the last 15 years. And, in that perspective, he does not stand alone because, in the West too, as Paul Heelas notes, the reduction to a consumption strategy has been the favourite tool of the critics of “alternative” spiritualities (2008, 83). However, what the majority of the critics of the New Age/new spirituality culture/spiritualities of life usually omit to include is a qualitative perspective. In other words, the movements and culture they attack are seen (or wanted to be seen) as homogeneous, their members presenting identical features that remain unchanged over time. The reality, however, is very different and the criticism needs fine-tuning in two ways.

Firstly, next to the spiritual therapists avid for wealth gained by all means possible, in the spiritual business I also found therapists who spent most of their earnings on new seminars and books and were simply glad to be making enough money to live a relatively comfortable life. For them, pursuing wealth should be avoided as

they felt that such behaviour would denigrate their pure, hobby-based, original interest in the spiritual. Moreover, aficionados of the new spirituality culture are not just mindless consumers. Many, and particularly those who have been long in this type of activity, consider that being able to choose and distinguish between good and bad, effective and worthless techniques and theories informs one's reputation as a respectable practitioner. In some of the observations on the general level, therefore, Paul Heelas' recent arguments in defence of the spiritual movement have some supporting evidence and will be considered further in Chapter 6.

On a second, case-specific level, critics of Japan's spiritual therapists have failed to acknowledge the influence of the pejorative image of religion on the way the spiritual business is practised in Japan today. The different methods which spiritual therapists adopt to avoid being put in the same "religious basket", an act very easy to commit as demonstrated by Sakurai's book, show that competitiveness, control of prices and credentialism, for example, may play a more significant role in these types of activity in Japan than in the West. And, here, some of the limitations of my methodology developed in section 3.4 can be used as ethnographic material informing the reluctance to share information and concern with responsibility that I found so difficult to penetrate during my interviews with the spiritual therapists. Additionally, the popularity of the profession of spiritual therapist can be linked to wider phenomena in contemporary Japanese society, such as the recent "qualification fever"<sup>72</sup> (or *kentei boom* as it is known) which I will discuss in the next section

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<sup>72</sup> Not to be confused with the more long-standing "exam fever" phenomenon of middle-school students and high-school students sitting for examinations that will allow them to go to a good high school or university respectively.

#### **4.1. On the path to professional spiritual therapy: Learning**

Regardless of the reason(s) for someone deciding to enter the spiritual business, once the decision has been taken, the first step, after reading Japanese translations of New Age classics (see section 3.1), is to join a class and learn preferably two or more healing techniques. These classes may take the form of private lessons, one-day to one-week seminars, or regular meetings at an institution established for that purpose. In Appendix 5, I have compiled a list of courses completed by my informants. The list is far from exclusive, considering that the spiritual healers I interviewed claimed each to have mastered on average five spiritual therapy techniques (see section 3.2), without including the various seminars they attended regularly to learn about the newest New Age theories and practices.

As mentioned earlier, the numerous schools and academies that started to appear nearly a decade ago share the largest and most lucrative part of the business. So far I have counted 40 institutions of which the majority have been established either by foreigners or they function as Japanese branches of mostly American-based companies. The largest and most popular of these schools seems to be the Rocky Mountain Mystery School (RMMS), with which eight of my informants are connected.

The RMMS has two headquarters in Japan (Tokyo and Osaka), and 11 others at locations around the globe (U.S.A, Canada, Ireland, U.K., Sweden, Taiwan, South Africa, the Philippines and Singapore). In the past three years, Japan has become the centre of its activities, since the headmaster and co-founder of the school, a certain Gudni Gudnason, divorced his business partner, Eleanor Gudnason (who three years ago opened her own school in Tokyo, called 2<sup>nd</sup> Ray Mystery School) to marry one of his Japanese students.

Gudni Gudnason, born in Iceland, claims to have been a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (a British magical order founded in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and revived in the late 1970s) and a master of universal *kabbalah*<sup>73</sup>, Celtic shamanism and ritual magic. According to my informants his rituals and teachings are impressive to watch and he has been a regular presenter at the yearly Alchemy Conference. Rumour has it, however, that Gudni was a failed martial artist in his native country, who, after meeting his wife, Laurie, a successful businesswoman and experienced channeller, became interested in the New Age. Together they established what resembles a spiritual business version of a pyramid scheme. Indeed, all initiates must go through a two-day programme to understand the basics of the RMMS cosmology at a cost of ¥55,000. At that point everyone is strongly encouraged to become a teacher, after spending a total of ¥58,270 on preliminary classes, which will enable them to teach the adept programme to others; but for every newly formed adept, they will have to pay ¥5,000 back to Gudni. Of course there are several types of teacher certificates, each with the necessary preliminary classes, and each allowing the newly qualified/graduated teacher to hold identical classes at his own healing salon with the obligation to attend a monthly meeting at the Tokyo headquarters and pay royalties for some of the sessions owned by Gudni. Finally, once the rank of Guide is reached (with the option of becoming Ritual Master in between), the RMMS member will be able to teach any course figuring in the RMMS curriculum, which at the moment includes 30 with new ones being introduced every year.

The official website of the RMMS reports that as of February 2008, 4,412 Japanese had become adepts and 80 certified Guides teach RMMS classes nationwide.

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<sup>73</sup> Esoteric branch of Judaism.

A 26-year old woman, who had just reached the Guide rank in March 2009, reported that by the time I interviewed her, in mid-April, five of her clients had completed the adept programme. RMMS Ltd declares a capital stock of ¥10 million and held its 7<sup>th</sup> Healing Convention in May 2009, which I estimate to have been one third of the size of the aforementioned *supicon* (see figure 4.1).

Not all spiritual education institutions present such an elaborate business scheme, but they all ultimately offer professional practitioner certificates that allow one to open a salon. In addition, considering the amount of money involved, all academies organise their classes at weekends and preferably spread them over a long period, from three months to three years, in order to ease the burden on the pockets of students, who are also usually in full-time employment. An increase in the number of institutions naturally, however, increases competition and leads to a fall in prices, which means that larger and older academies, such as Japan Clearlight, were reported to be on the verge of bankruptcy trying to cut costs by, for example, discontinuing their monthly newsletter. Ms Smith, the head of a middle-size school, and one of the few spiritual teachers who has spent almost all her career in Japan and is fluent in Japanese, complained to me last May that, whereas usually she has to make \$12,000 per month to cover her expenses (she rents a large apartment where she organises her classes, and employs a secretary), for the month of April she had only made \$8,000. Instead, therefore, she tries to hold seminars and workshops at events such as the Wesak Festival organised in early May, where she talked in front of 150 visitors who had paid an entrance fee of ¥8,000 to attend what is really another mini-*supicon*.

Figure 4.1 ‘Sacred Planet’: the *supicon*-type event organised by RMMS on 9 May 2009



In the late-1980s, when the New Age Movement had just hit the shores of Japan, a small group of fans of all spiritual theories and healing techniques started to invite foreign spiritual teachers to tour the country; Daryl Anka, for example, the self-proclaimed channel of a “multi-dimensional entity” called Bashar, first arrived in Japan in 1987 and is said to have spoken in front of more than a thousand visitors. This small group of fans went on later to launch New Age magazines, such as FILI or NAO (which have now suspended publication) and companies specializing in organizing such tours. One of them, VOICE Inc., remains the largest and most active establishment in the field, currently offering a staggering 46 workshops, involving nearly 30 presenters, in addition to spiritual tours, and the selling of books and other types of goods such as amulets, essential oils, music CDs and the like. VOICE was opened in 1988 by Hori Masumi, 38 years old at the time, who continues to be, as he claims, the biggest fan of



spiritual workshops. VOICE has since founded three other sister-companies, which, in total, declare a capital stock of ¥36 million.

Smaller companies include Dynavision Corp. (declared capital stock ¥10 million), opened in 1996 by Anaguchi Keiko, also headmaster of two spiritual academies, and Natural Spirit Ltd which opened in 1997, and has an exclusive contract with Eric Pearl, the founder of the popular “reconnection”, which ten of the spiritual therapists interviewed offer at their salon. Similarly those companies are involved in publishing and selling New Age-types of goods.

On the other hand, in the last couple of years, there has been a surge of smaller scale workshops and seminars organised by private spiritual healers eager to teach their most fervent clients their own understanding of the universe. As mentioned in section 3.4, 44 of the 68 practitioners are running seminars or workshops. While the majority only teach an adapted version of what they have learnt elsewhere, some make up their own curriculum, seeking originality in an increasingly competitive sector. Ms Fumada’s channelling course has already been mentioned as an example (see Chapter 3) where I noted this recent popularisation of one-time, small-scale seminars, particularly those run by newly established practitioners. At the moment, four factors may be said to have caused such a phenomenon.

Firstly, while classes in schools may attract up to 100 students, as in the case of A Course in Miracles at *Yasuragi no Heya* (Room of Tranquility)<sup>74</sup> (see Appendix 5), private seminars range from two to 20 students. These small-scale seminars have the advantage of proximity and intimacy with the teacher, who is no longer a distant figure

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<sup>74</sup> Information shared by Ms Sachimura who, in March 2009, was in her third year of study at *Yasuragi no Heya*.

of authority, but one's own spiritual guide, and who often in the period preceding the start of the course, has been, and perhaps still is periodically listening to personal issues during regular spiritual healing sessions. Indeed, the most appealing feature of small-scale, privately run seminars is their tailor-made nature that originates in the teacher's familiarity with each of his or her students.

Secondly, if Japan is ten years behind in terms of the popularisation of New Age practices and beliefs (as I was often told by my informants), Marion Bowman's decade old-argument that 'there is undoubtedly a growth in credentialism in the holistic healing sector, as in society generally' (1999, 186) has come finally to apply to the Japanese setting too. Members of the new spirituality culture in Japan, after being exposed to and having used the myriad theories and practices which began to be imported mainly from the U.S.A and the U.K. in the late 1990s (RMMS, for example, first reached Japan in 1997) may have also begun to be interested in the production-side of these activities.

Thirdly, credentialism may be linked to socio-cultural factors: the credentialist nature of Japanese society in which the level of education is the primary determinant of class affiliation and by extension a major cause of social inequality is a recently developed argument (Kikkawa, 2006) which may explain the infatuation of Japanese practitioners with diplomas attesting to their spiritual therapeutic abilities. This cultural trend has been utilized by the market economy in the last three years, giving birth to the "qualification fever" phenomenon. A 2007 *The Japan Times* article noted: 'many Japanese of all ages are flocking to fonts of knowledge on everything from *kanji* (Chinese written characters), to *shochu* (low-class distilled spirits) to movies and

aromatherapy'<sup>75</sup>. The same article reports that these open-to-all tests started becoming popular from the launch of the Tokyo City Guide Test in November 2003 and since then have spread to various fields of knowledge, from history and tourism, to food, culture and celebrity gossip. Websites like *Yahoo Minna no Kentei*<sup>76</sup> (Yahoo Everyone's Qualification) now hosts more than 300,000 exams often written by amateur fans of the *kentei* phenomenon and proposing to test the applicant's knowledge on any topic imaginable, from naming the stations on a specific train line to showing one's mastery of the Osaka dialect.

Finally, the increase of certified spiritual healers means fewer customers for everyone. Thus, in the current financial crisis, setting up a course, in the words of Ms Fumada, 'ensures a regular income', which, as with a monthly salary-system, may be assumed to range between hundreds of thousands of yen. In fact, if we multiply the cost of Ms Fumada's course by the number of students and divide that amount by 12, we arrive at Ms Fumada's monthly income originating from this one type of group activity only: ¥612,500. No wonder, therefore, that the number of individuals looking to enter the spiritual therapist profession has increased!

Before I discuss the next step on the path to professional spiritual therapy, I should mention that there are also one-to-one lessons which usually teach a specific technique such as for example, Mr Yoshie who offers a four-month tarot fortune-telling course for the price of ¥67,800. While this style of lesson is no longer common, I sometimes heard surprising stories of, for instance, a two-hour *reiki* session leading to the obtaining of a *reiki* master certificate and costing ¥200,000. Such cases are not uncommon in the

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<sup>75</sup> *The Japan Times*, 18 March 2007.

<sup>76</sup> <http://minna.cert.yahoo.co.jp/>

spiritual business, but they have been the subject of criticism among the professionals themselves and thus will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

## 4.2. On the path to professional spiritual therapy: Setting up

Once the aspiring professional spiritual healer has spent an estimated minimum of ¥1 million on courses<sup>77</sup>, seminars and books on spiritual therapy theories and techniques, the time usually comes to set up in business.

The first step consists of opening a professional web page. Full-time practitioners often hire a web designer to build a basic template for them to then enrich with their own updates in the form of text. The web designer is preferably a friend, a client or at least someone who is familiar with the atmosphere of the “the world of the spiritual”. For example, Aiko, a freelance web designer regularly working with spiritual healers, offers her services for an average of ¥150,000 with the promise to help update the homepage for the first six months. Subsequently, the webpage is usually posted on a portal site, usually (not always) for a fee. Amateur-run portal websites such as the one I used to contact half of my informants, *teddyangel.com*, was not originally asking for

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<sup>77</sup> If we consider the case of Ms Noda whose credentials were used as a sample in figure 1 section 3.2, we can calculate the amount spent on training before opening her salon in July 2009 as follows:

1) psychic course: ¥157,500 (beginner level) + ¥252,000 (intermediate level) + ¥336,000 (advanced level) = ¥745,500

2) hypnotherapy course: ¥157,500 (introductory level) + ¥252,000 (regular level) = ¥409,500

3) Reiki master course: ¥200,000

4) Crystal therapy course: ¥126,000

5) Macrobiotic Academy's cooking course: ¥77,070 (basic I) + ¥82,320 (basic II) + 105,420 (advanced) = ¥264,810

In total, Ms Noda's credentials cost ¥1,745,810.

such a fee, but in May 2009, the owner of the portal introduced a first-up system which for the sum of ¥10,000 offers to raise the applicant's website to the first position on the list on which it figures. More eager professionals can also pay a monthly fee of ¥30,000 to have a banner advertising their salon at the top of the *teddyangel.com*, but this does not seem to be a very popular option. Professional portals such as *cocorila.jp*<sup>78</sup> provide a more sophisticated advertisement scheme as that shown in the following figure<sup>79</sup>:

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<sup>78</sup> According to the website, the name 'cocorila' comes from the combination of *kokoro* (heart/soul) and 'relax'. As of 1 February 2010, *cocorila.jp* declared 200,000 website page hits per month.

<sup>79</sup> Copied from a leaflet received from Ms Shibata on 2 April 2010.

Figure 4.2 Costs of advertising banners on cocorila.jp

The screenshot shows the homepage of cocorila.jp with several advertising banners. Three specific banners are highlighted with callouts:

- 537x75px banner:** Located at the top right, featuring a woman's face and the text "女神の画家 高杉 綾知 京都個展決定! 銀河観音 IN 京都 恋愛★peace 2010年4月17日(土)~25日(日)". Cost: ¥42,000 per month.
- 671x93px banner:** Located in the middle right section, featuring a woman's face and the text "DRYIN・バーチャル 沖縄1dayワークショップ開催決定! 2010年7月18日(日)". Cost: ¥31,500 per month.
- 188x71px banner:** Located in the bottom right section, featuring a woman's face and the text "トウリーダ-養成ワークショップ 4月29日, 30日, 5月1日, 2日". Cost: ¥21,000 per month.

Other visible banners include a "NEW! 天一神って知ってますか?" banner, a "ちょっとトクした気分になる! メンバー限定特典コーナー" banner, and a "ユーザーの声から産まれたオラクルカードポーチ" banner.

In the previous chapter I noted the significance of word of mouth (*kuchikomi*) in the spiritual business and how its internet form contributes to an estimated three-quarter

of the 90 per cent of clients who were reported to have reached a spiritual salon through the introduction of another client. I showed that a clear and simple-to-use website, together with a frequently updated blog equipped with a system that allows you to follow the daily access and popularity of the blog posts, comprise the key elements for a successful generation of *kuchikomi*. Despite, therefore, the relatively cheap (or even free for those computer-literate therapists) ways of building a website and blog, it does not mean that a certain business sense is not necessary to make the most of this fundamental client-harvesting method. Hence, hereafter, I introduce three examples of the spiritual therapists' know-how related to the use of the Internet.

Assuming that the first impression of a salon is carried by its name (which is also often the name of the website), the choice of what to call one's place is of more importance than we might imagine. Indeed, beyond the obvious necessity of being reminiscent of a spiritual theme, the appellation will also affect the type of clientele attracted to that salon. For example, a friend of Ms Saeda first included in the name of her salon the word 'mental' (*mentaru* in katakana script) which automatically became the keyword by which an internet user would reach her webpage. To the surprise of that spiritual therapist, however, the majority of her new clients were male company employees with stressful lives and needing mental care, a field she had no experience in and had no desire to enter. Therefore, she decided to change the name of the website and replace the word 'mental' with '*shamballa*' (written in English), which attracted a very different clientele. Considering that *shamballa*<sup>80</sup> is a characteristically New Age word only those versed in the vocabulary of the occulture, who, as previously

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<sup>80</sup> Originally referring to a mythical pure land in Tibetan Buddhism and later popularized in the West by the Theosophical Society's founder, Madama Blavatsky, who made it the home of the Great White Brotherhood and believed in its real location somewhere in Tibet (Washington, 1995, 34).

mentioned are predominantly female, would understand its significance. Consequently, as reported by Ms Saeda, not only the clients' gender changed, but also most of the newcomers already held a positive stance towards spiritual therapy and this significantly eased the beginner-practitioner's job.

With the decision for a name for the salon, the spiritual therapist also needs to advertise his or her chosen techniques. Arguably, there is not much leeway in this domain because the terms used are fixed and those are the keywords which the prospective client will enter into an internet search engine to find the corresponding professionals. And that is where know-how becomes important just as in any other business that tries to be ahead of the game in offering its services to the interested individual. The following two cases demonstrate the importance of this know-how in the spiritual business.

Mr Yogino specializes in hypnotherapy, a technique popularized by Brian Weiss and currently taught by at least four foreign teachers in Japan (each with their own derivative hypnotherapeutic practice) and several Japanese therapists who have opened their own schools. Needless to say there are a lot of hypnotherapists in Japan (18 of my informants, including Mr Yogino, offered hypnotherapy in their menu of therapies). Hence, in the words of Mr Yogino, 'I had real trouble finding customers in the beginning until I decided to put all my efforts into the website'. Mr Yogino did not want to pay for advertising and focussed entirely on getting his website to appear on the first page of search engines such as Google and Yahoo. To do this, he studied programming and web design on his own for two months and eventually reached his objective. 'I chose two keywords, "hypnotherapy" (in katakana script) and "*zense ryōhō*" (前世療法 which literally means "past-life therapy") and strategically scattered them around the



website so that they make up 25 per cent of all the text. But I had to be careful, because too much text is not good either; so the words have to be in the right place and the sentences have to make sense', explained Mr Yogino.

Indeed many therapists were aware and concerned about the position of the website in search engines. Ms Kikuko's case is similar to the above, but the solution given was different. Ms Kikuko is a fortune-teller, spiritual writer, aromatherapist and aura reader, and also specializes in past-life reading, a very popular spiritual counselling technique, rendered particularly famous by Ehara Hiroyuki's TV readings. In these cases, 'past-life' is almost always translated into Japanese as *zense* (as in the case of 'past-life therapy' above), but Ms Kikuko's husband, a systems engineer<sup>81</sup>, one day had the idea of suggesting that his wife employ the word *kakose* (過去世 which has the same meaning but uses different characters) instead, a far less common term in the spiritual business, and now Ms Kikuko's website shows up first on a Google search on *kakose*.

The internet therefore is arguably the main tool for attracting customers to the spiritual business, but the professional spiritual therapist may decide to spend more substantial sums of money to advertise their salon. One way is participation at events such as *supicon* or the *iyashi fair*. In contrast to some years ago when Sakurai seems to have regarded *supicon* as another opportunity for practitioners to earn their living, *supicon*, or, in fact, *supima* (spiritual market) as it was renamed in October 2008, has turned into a mere showcase of what is available out there, while the practitioners who attend make only enough for a night-out at a high-class restaurant.

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<sup>81</sup> See section 3.1.

The price of a regular-sized booth (there are also half-size, large size and L-shaped booths) at the *supima* that I attended in Tokyo in May 2009, was ¥27,500 and it could accommodate three people. That day I visited two booths. The first was rented by four of my informants who had paid an extra ¥2,100 to accommodate a fourth person at the booth, and an additional ¥2,100 for a guarantee that their booth would be located by the wall so that no one would stand or walk behind them. Another two informants who had only paid the basic rental fee occupied the second booth. None of them asked for extra chairs, which would have cost ¥525 each or for access to electricity, for which they would have had to pay ¥2,100. In total, therefore, it cost ¥8,000 per person at the first booth, and ¥13,750 per person at the second booth to take part in this eight-hour event. Considering that, regardless of the type of technique used (spiritual counselling, aura reading, hypnotherapy and metaphysiotherapy), the price was set at ¥3,000 for a 15-minute session, and that each informant reported having treated six to eight clients that day, I estimate that the four healers at the first booth made an average profit of ¥13,000 each and the two healers at the second booth each went home with ¥7,250.

While I cannot speak for the rest of the 86 booths nor for the conventions organised at other locations (the *supima* organised in Yokohama-city is slightly more popular), it seems likely that this event has recently been attracting two types of practitioners: beginners who need to get their name out and build a clientèle, and regular participants who do not own or rent a salon, and thus cannot hold on to a regular clientèle. As reported by the majority of practitioners interviewed, such events are not money-making opportunities and in the last couple of years they have been seen as rather low-grade, “incompetent” therapists’ gatherings.

Before I move on to the crucial choice of the salon's location, it is worth noting that the larger spiritual academies, like the RMMS or Clearlight Japan, advertise on their website and newsletters a list of certified graduates. And, finally, for those who are ready to spend larger sums of money to promote their activities, magazines of "the world of the spiritual" usually dedicate half of their volumes to introducing new or popular salons. One of my informants, Ms Usumi, was reported to have paid to the quarterly editions of *Trinity* and *Start People*, from 2003 to 2008, a yearly fee of ¥130,000 and ¥150,000 respectively for a two-page feature on her healing salon. However, in 2009, and as with Ms Kawasaki, she realized that she had gained very few clients from these advertisements, and discontinued her payments,

A third step in setting up a spiritual therapy salon consists of choosing the location. Forty-one of the 68 spiritual healers interviewed run their sessions in a room at their own house, and three of them also rent another room to either accommodate clients who live far from the original location, or to conduct seminars with a bigger audience. For those who have the space and the understanding of their husband and family, running a business at home, in an often small, but nicely decorated room, with two comfortable chairs, a small table, and the sound of relaxing music in the background, guarantees client satisfaction and ease to open up and concentrate on the session. The only disadvantage is related to the danger of inviting a stranger into one's home. This problem is usually dealt with in one of two ways: a women-only system and communication of the exact address only after reservation.

Indeed, since the majority of spiritual healers are women, those who use their home for business almost always prefer to have only women as clients, and accept men

only if they have been introduced by a former client or accompany their wife<sup>82</sup>. Considering that the average percentage of female clients accounted for more than 80 per cent, the women-only system is not expected to be hindering business in any case.

Six of the remaining 27 healers meet clients in public areas, most often coffee shops in the vicinity of their regular workplace or their home, and in some rare cases they visit the client's house. With one exception, those who did not have many clients but were still practising spiritual therapy full-time, all have a regular job and practice spiritual therapy on the side. They usually ask the client to pay for their drink, although it is not obligatory. Paradoxically, this type of location does not seem to affect the number of clients, which rather depends on the availability and quality of the spiritual healer rather than the surrounding environment.

Finally, the last group of informants (21) constitutes those who rent a one-room ordinary apartment or a therapy salon built for that specific purpose. While an ordinary twenty square metre one-room apartment in central Tokyo may be rented for an average of ¥80,000 per month, this type of session room of course requires a regular clientèle to ensure a regular income. Rental therapy salons however have the advantage of being adequately furnished, often including an orthopaedic bed, and are available by the hour. This kind of service comprises yet another facet of the spiritual business: indeed companies renting healing salons are usually also offering spiritual healing sessions and/or courses. Salons may be rented at an average of ¥1,600 per hour on weekdays and ¥2,200 on weekends, depending on the time of day (evenings are usually more expensive).

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<sup>82</sup> In fact, only six practitioners reported having an exclusively female clientele.

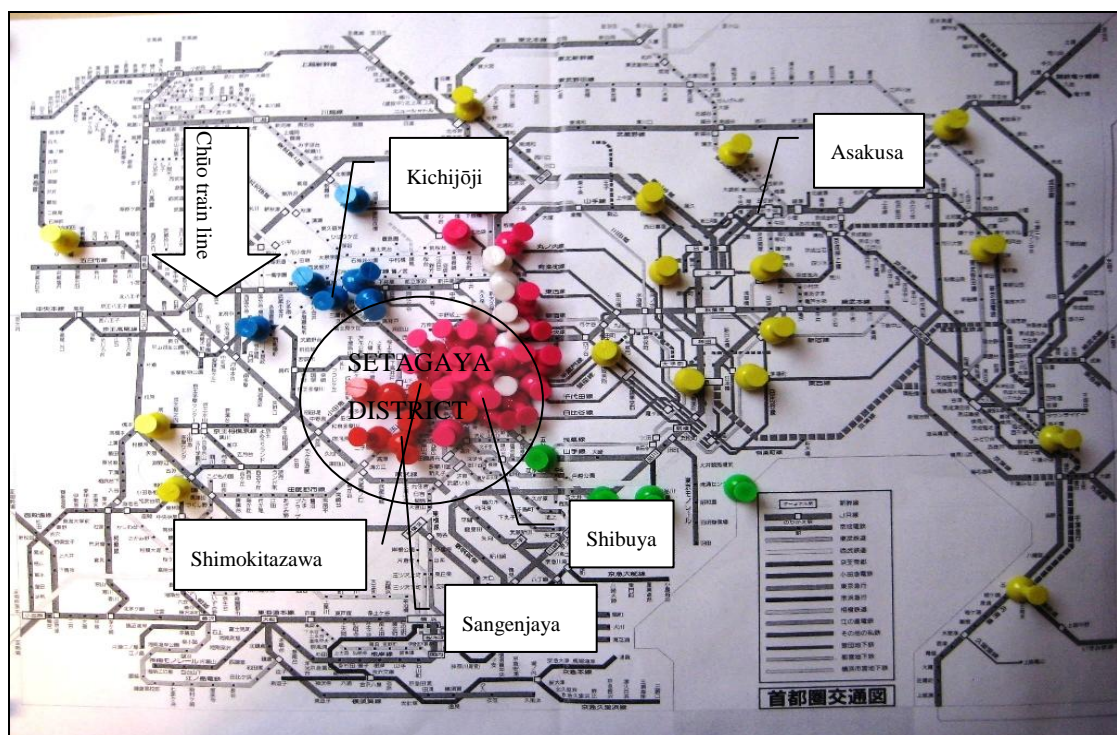
Ultimately, renting a salon, despite the extra fee either included in the session's price or required as an addition from the client, has another significant benefit. It allows the practitioner to choose the location where he or she will open for business. The ideal location, as reported by my informants, is usually an area with no other or few spiritual healers and, simultaneously, near a proclaimed spiritual spot recognized among the fans of "the spiritual". In the past, the neighbourhoods along the Chūo train line connecting Mount Fuji to Tokyo were very popular not only for their easy access from the city-centre, but also because it is believed that this train line was built on an "energy vein" of the Japanese nation linking the spiritual symbol of the country to its modern financial and technological centre. Sociologically, the Chūo train line, particularly the stations from Kōenji to Kichijōji were associated with the 1960s-1970s hippy movement in Japan because they were populated with the youth who had come to the capital to realize their dreams. A certain subculture was thus created in the area and can still be seen near Kichijōji station at night, for example, famous for the street musicians who are often high-school or university students aspiring to become professionals.

Looking at the map (figure 4.3 below) of locations of my informants' salons, it becomes clear that it is primarily the wealthy area of Tokyo, spanning from Shibuya south-west to the Setagaya district, which is popular among spiritual healers. Recently, however, competitiveness and the decrease in the number of clients have pushed some spiritual healers to seek new locations. The previously mentioned Ms Noda, for example, decided to set up her salon in the east of Tokyo, in the proximity of the famous Sensōji temple in Asakusa, indisputably a powerful spiritual area due to the temple's status as the oldest in the capital. Ms Tanaka admitted to having verified that there was a lack of healing salons in the neighbourhood, and that she had decided to

reduce her prices because of the general image shared by Tokyoites that characterises the east of Tokyo as being inhabited by a population of a lower economic status.

Setting up business, as I hope I have shown in this section, takes considerable effort and thought if the professional wishes to make a living out of spiritual therapy. With the increase in the number of practitioners, the aspiring therapist has to take advantage of all the technologies at his or her disposal and often break out of the traditional methods (often stemming from socio-cultural phenomena which I will consider in the next chapters), and path their own way to a viable job.

Figure 4.3 Location by name of train station of the spiritual therapists practising in Tokyo



#### 4.3. On the path to professional spiritual therapy: Practising

From my very first interview, the price of spiritual therapy sessions was a constant inquiry. It is after all the main element of the spiritual business, and for the 31 full-time

practitioners who are also single, it is their unique source of income. This income, nevertheless, is very difficult to estimate for it was unanimously argued by my informants that they have no way of predicting the number of clients each month. Hence, as I explained in the first part of this chapter, there has recently been a tendency to organise seminars, workshops and other group activities to seek a more stable income. Nevertheless, individual sessions remain the core of the spiritual therapist's profession. In section 3.2, I estimated that a session with a spiritual therapist in Japan today would cost on average ¥16,000. In this section, I look at how this price varies between different categories or within the same category of therapies and what therapists can do besides one-to-one sessions and group activities to increase their income. First, let us look at the prices according to the six categories of spiritual therapy defined in the previous chapter, starting with the two most popular: spiritual-type and energy-type.

If I were to simplify the spiritual-type category, I would argue that all therapies within it are basically divination techniques. Sessions whose names end with the words 'reading' or 'counselling' may be thought of as being elaborate or, more specifically, evolved fortune-telling methods. In chapter 5, I will substantially revise this argument in my discussion, but for practical reasons, I shall retain it for the moment because it will allow me to link fortune-telling, which has always been the cheapest choice, to this spiritual-type category. Indeed, whereas one can always get one's hand read in front of Shinjuku station for a mere ¥1,000, booths inside department stores or independent divination salons (see figure 4.4) may ask for a higher price. The fortune-telling salon advertised inside the bus heading to Mitaka station, for example, asks for ¥3,000 for a 30-minute session and ¥5,000 per hour, irrespective of the technique used. One of my

informants, Ms Kikuko, includes in her sessions a 30-minute tarot reading for ¥4,000. Many of the spiritual therapists (15 in my sample) started, in fact, with fortune-telling salons before moving on to other techniques.

Figure 4.4 Fortune-telling booths inside a department store in central Tokyo<sup>83</sup>



Although diviners who work for companies, as reported in *The Japan Times* article, make just enough to support themselves, independent fortune-telling face-to-face or over the phone, for those who are skilled, certainly remains a very lucrative and stable business (it is worth noting that a voice-advertisement inside a bus

<sup>83</sup> The sign says:

Open from 12pm to 8pm. Chinese Astrology (I Ching), Divination, Physiognomy, Astrology, Name Fortunetelling, Hand Reading, Astrology based on the Chinese Twelve Year Cycle, *Dan'eki* (type of Chinese divination technique based on the five elements), Tarot, House Physiognomy etc.

List of Prices (per person):

*financial situation/lucky item* --> from ¥1,050 (tax included)

*appropriate job/love life (only to concerned individuals)* --> from ¥2,100 (tax included)

*health/entrance exams/change of job/travel/wedding* --> from ¥3,150 (tax included)

*love compatibility/personal relations/moving house* --> from ¥4,200 (tax included)

*husband and wife relationships/real estate/find better luck* --> from ¥5,250 (tax included)

*business/family issues* --> ¥6,300 (tax included)

The above prices are per item. Longer sessions (over 40 minutes) are subject to extra cost.

House physiognomy and Naming require a special fee.



in central Tokyo may cost an average of ¥500,000 per year). Indeed, it is well known among professionals that over the years of practice, fortune-tellers build databases of all the cases they have come across, trying to categorize and typify answers and solutions in order to increase the probability of their getting the next divination right; and to a certain extent the same may be done with the other spiritual-type techniques (see section 6.1). However, if fortune-telling sessions remain in the few thousands of yen, the majority of spiritual-type therapies imply the use of an extra-ordinary power to obtain information from what are believed to be supernatural realms and are thus usually much more expensive.

I have already mentioned in Chapter 3 that a spiritual counselling session, in my sample, may have cost up to ¥15,000 per hour (with two hours often being a minimum length). Spiritual counselling, as popularized by Ehara Hiroyuki, may be understood as a first sub-category that includes all techniques reminiscent of the Western channelling sessions. The second subcategory of “reading” sessions (such as aura reading, spirit reading, energy reading, clairvoyant reading and so forth), considering that they do not usually include counselling time (i.e. a period at the beginning of the session during which the client explains his/her issues) are meant to be cheaper: Ms Hamazaki offers a 75 minute-aura reading session for ¥12,000, whereas Ms Sasakawa’s 60 minute-aura reading session costs ¥17,000 and her 2-hour session costs ¥25,000. The business sense of Ms Sasakawa here is obvious and such methods of influencing the client’s choice of length of session are not uncommon in the spiritual business.

The other popular category of healing-type therapies presents a greater range of prices. I should first emphasize that most of these techniques, and particularly *reiki*, hand-healing, reconnection and crystal healing which were the most frequently

encountered therapies, are practised by a professional who also conducts spiritual-type sessions in the commonly observed New Age understanding of therapy as the simultaneous care of body, mind and soul. Mr Nakamura is a typical example of a healing-type therapist: he started off as a masseur, and moved on to opening his chiropractic salon, before a reading of James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy* convinced him of his healing powers and led him to join RMMS and then the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ray Mystery School. Today, although he offers channelling and distant energy work, such as DNA activation, ethereal healing and other techniques he learned at Gudni's academy, his most popular sessions remain those of direct energy work in the form of massage. His 'total healing' session costs ¥18,000 for 90-minutes, but he himself admitted that sessions usually tend to last longer, particularly when the patient comes for the second or third time and starts talking about inner issues. Mr Nakamura, indeed, believes that every one of our worries translates into stomps of energies that are transmitted to the muscles of the body, hence his focus on energy massage.

Energy work, which is another name often given to this category, such as reconnection or the sessions provided by RMMS graduates, has a fixed price set usually by the inventor. In the case of "reconnection" for example, whose originator, Eric Pearl, has become extremely famous in Japan, the price is ¥54,333 for a two-hour treatment that is meant to be received once in a lifetime. The price of "reconnective healing", which can be taken as often as one wishes, on the other hand, depends on the practitioner and ranges from between ¥12,000 and ¥21,000 per hour. On 9 April 2010, the directory of the official website of Eric Pearl (*thereconnection.com*) listed 719 certified reconnective healers in Japan, compared to 78 in the United Kingdom, 1763 in the United States and ten in China.

It would be extremely lengthy, and even tedious, to provide the prices for all these healing-type techniques, but I am adding here the costs of the most frequently encountered therapies: Mr Kenji, a young RMMS graduate offers the popular *DNA activation* therapy (which includes a bottle of antimony<sup>84</sup> to be drunk in small doses by the patient) for ¥15,000, while another of RMMS's popular sessions, *King Solomon healing modality*, costs ¥17,000 and requires the client to receive it ten times (i.e. ¥170,000). Crystal healing and meta-physiotherapy both make use of crystals, but the second technique also comprises elements of hypnotherapy and is thus more expensive: Ms Nishimura offers a 2-hour session of crystal healing for ¥15,000, whereas Ms Kimura's meta-physiotherapy costs ¥25,000. Here it is worth noting that prices between sessions taken at companies such as the school Y introduced in chapter 3 and sessions provided at the private salon of the same therapist differ: in this case, for example, Ms Kimura's meta-physiotherapy session, if taken at school Y, is priced at ¥30,000. The subcategory of massage-based techniques such as inner organs massage, rain drop, aura-soma and the like, is often cheaper than the other healing-type therapies: Mr Nakamura's inner organs massage costs ¥12,000 and Ms Chizuko's rain drop is priced at ¥10,000, which is also often the cost of an aura-soma session, such as the one figuring in the menu of aura-soma specialist, Ms Michiko.

Together with the hypno-type therapies, which also rarely exceed ¥20,000 for a 90-minute session (Ms Mimura's 3-hour session, for example, costs ¥26,500), the above two categories of spiritual-type and healing-type techniques are the most frequently encountered at salons run by individual therapists. Business-type sessions, such as NLP

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<sup>84</sup> See chapter 5 for a discussion of the function of antimony in this therapy and of the real dangers of such a widespread technique.

for example often take the form of group seminars and are almost always conceived as part of a sister-branch of “the world of the spiritual” that is the self-development (*jiko keihatsu*) phenomenon. Therapists tend to go to such courses, but do not offer them in salons, unless in business consultation-format that has little to do with spiritual therapy. The remaining two categories are also rarely encountered for two different reasons: the oriental-type therapies used to be popular two decades ago and with time have “lost” their effectiveness in the eyes of members of the new spirituality culture who are looking to solve their issues or change their life-style. I argue, in fact, that these techniques have joined the category of fortune-telling (today no *qiqong* session exceeds ¥5,000 per hour). As for the earth-type techniques, they are either too expensive (often including travelling costs) or, more importantly, old-fashioned in the sense that they do not focus on the individual, who, as discussed in chapter 1, remains the centre of the new spirituality culture. They also do not have fixed prices and are thus very difficult to keep track of.

So far, I have demonstrated that, within my sample of professional practitioners, regardless of the type of technique used, we find a fairly stable range of prices that almost never exceeds ¥15,000 per hour. This, of course, does not mean that no spiritual therapist asks for more. Charisma, success and subsequent popularity greatly influence prices, and although I did not have the opportunity to meet any of the celebrity-therapists, stories of their exploits are common subjects of discussion, together with the exorbitant prices of their session. Indeed, a relatively popular healer could ask for ¥25,000 per hour, while the services of famous spiritual counsellors such as Anaguchi Keiko’s 50-minute session, start at ¥30,000. Foreign spiritual healers who come to Japan mainly to conduct seminars, are more expensive: Margaret Rogers (the

inventor of meta-physiotherapy) asks for ¥51,450 per hour, and there are of course extreme cases of counselling fees that climb to hundreds of thousands of yen: an inside source claimed that TV celebrity and fortune-teller Hosoki Kazuko used to be paid ¥10 million per hour for her broadcast sessions, whereas Sri Kaleshwar, a young Indian spiritual leader who has a strong following in Japan and a ritual centre in Northern Kyushu, was reported to be receiving a staggering \$500 for a five-minute conversation.

However, for the regular spiritual healer who finds it difficult to stand out among the masses of fellow professionals, there are two other ways to increase revenue. One was discussed previously in the learning steps on the path to professional spiritual healing and concerns the organisation of seminars and/or workshops whose costs vary greatly. If, like Ms Fumada, the practitioner actively organises such group activities every month, I believe that it is safe to estimate that these events add at least ¥500,000 to the therapist's monthly income.

The selling of healing objects is a second, yet financially much less significant source of income. There are three types of healing objects. Firstly, there are solid objects, such as stones, amulets and crystals which are rubbed on the body, worn, touched or just kept within one's vicinity, and are meant to provide energy, luck and protection from disease, stress or simply maleficent influences. Spiritual healers usually buy these stones at specialized shops such as the famous Aikōdō in the Jiyūgaoka district of Tokyo, run by two siblings from Okinawa, who also make bracelets, ear rings and necklaces that range from ¥5,000 to ¥50,000 according to the stones used and the purpose of the object. In fact, the making of a healing object itself is the most important part of the process, because it is the short discussion time that usually precedes the choice of colours and shapes of material to be used that gives meaning to the healing

object for its user. Accessories made of power stones and sold at spiritual healing salons are always cheaper, between ¥1,000 and ¥5,000, than those one finds at a New Age type of cosmetics shop, and may be included in the price of a regular energy work or spiritual counselling session.

A second type of healing object comprises liquid or creamy substances, such as flower remedies (made by placing fresh flowers into spring water and then adding brandy), essential oils for massaging, and mist sprays containing perfumed water meant to carry the energy of a certain angel or god and which play the same role as solid objects. This type of healing object costs between ¥1,500 and ¥3,100 and is also often used during energy work sessions.

Oracle cards, which on a daily basis may predict the course of events and suggest the most favourable frame of mind with which to start the day, and “attunement” texts, the New Age equivalent of a prayer meant to transmit to its reader energy, wisdom and general life advice, are the last types of object found at a spiritual healer’s salon<sup>85</sup>. Their prices vary, but rarely surpass ¥10,000 if purchased online. The reading of attunement texts by the healer in front of the client may be considered however as a healing session with its appropriate price, depending on the power of the text, ranging from ¥8,000 to ¥20,000. Mr Takahashi, for example, who, at the time of our first interview, worked full-time at a publishing company and conducted sessions, mainly on the phone, during the lunch break and evening hours, started business two years ago by buying attunement texts from a Danish channeller for the price of £36, which he then sold for ¥6,500 by e-mail, or for ¥8,000 when handed directly to the client. By June 2009, Mr Takahashi was selling on average 30 attunement texts per month, and after having invested in the

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<sup>85</sup> For an example of an attunement manual, see Appendix 2.

courses of the newly established Theta Healing Japan Academy, he planned to start a full-time career as a professional theta healer.

#### **4.4. Money is energy: opinions of spiritual therapists on an unstable business.**

On 2 April 2010, on a short trip to Japan, I met Mr Takahashi again to find out about the new lifestyle to which he had claimed to aspire for more than half a year. I knew already that he had stopped working as his new blog informed readers of his absence from Japan during the month of February, a holiday span that can hardly be allowed at a normal Japanese company. As I later learned, Mr Takahashi quit his editorial job in October 2009, moved to a newly-built (2 year-old) apartment in a nice, green area, 10-minutes away from central Tokyo and, from December 2010, made in his new home the salon he had been unable to provide earlier. ‘You know how much I was making at my previous job? ¥200,000. Now, I am easily earning ¥1 million per month’ exclaimed Mr Takahashi, proudly in the first minute of our conversation.

His activities had also changed: although he still had 20 to 30 clients per month (over the phone/skype or face-to-face) and still sold attunements which he admitted as comprising one fifth of his monthly income, the majority of his current earnings originate from seminars he is organizing twice a month at rented locations in central Tokyo. ‘People say that I am really good at teaching, so I am focussing on that type of activity because I also just prefer receiving substantial amounts of money<sup>86</sup> at once, rather than putting a lot of effort into helping one single individual and getting less than one tenth of that’. If we were to draw a conclusion as to what makes individuals such as

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<sup>86</sup> Which I estimate to be around ¥200,000 per seminar.

Mr Takahashi enter the spiritual business, this would automatically be summarised in one word: money. Unarguably, for such an active spiritual therapist, with no family ties, refusing no client, and updating his blog sometimes three times per day, a monthly income of ¥1 million yen represents an easy target to reach. Ms Fumada, mentioned earlier, probably earns about the same amount, while less active professionals usually must find themselves with around ¥500,000 at the end of a busy month. At the same time, however, what I want to emphasize here is that for a motivated and skilled practitioner, as for a motivated and skilled businessman of any sector, work can be very rewarding. Yet, for two reasons, I should not stop at this conclusion.

Firstly, external circumstances, even for those therapists with a high percentage of repeaters, always influence the number of sessions they can secure per month. These external circumstances are related to the nature of the service provided, to the quick turnover of types of therapies, and to the double-faceted character of a mainly internet/media-based legitimacy.

By the nature of the service provided, I mean that the practitioner basically depends on people having issues they wish to resolve to get customers. Hence, because these issues are of psychological/social origin, there are periods of high and low demand for spiritual therapeutic services. One of my informants compared this trend to the suicide periods in Japan, in other words the periods of the year when the suicide rate increases, such as for example, the Christmas holidays when people find themselves alone, or the March-April period which coincides with university entrance examinations, the beginning of the new fiscal year and the start or end of contract jobs. Another type of period when business is good are holidays when prospective clients are said to have the time to ponder various issues and try to find solutions. Consequently,



there may be times, such as for example the month of February when Mr Takahashi left Japan, when the monthly income is predicted to be much lower.

For those practitioners who work with a lot of repeaters, another problem occurs: with few exceptions, fervent clients tend to try out all the sessions and seminars provided at a specific salon and then go somewhere else. In chapter 6 I will try to refine this argument, especially because some repeaters are using spiritual therapists as life counsellors. But, in this instance, interviews with professionals showed that they need constantly to provide new versions of the same therapy or new therapies in order to keep their clientele. This means that they have to constantly invest in new seminars and material, preferably not available in Japan, to enrich their menu of sessions. For example, two therapies are said to be on the decline lately: crystal healing and hypnotherapy. Ms Nishimura, originally a crystal healer who had already complained in June 2009 of the low popularity of her technique, introduced in March 2010, an angel therapy session, which has no connection with crystals. Ms Shibata, the owner of school Y, where I had the opportunity to meet her again on 2 April 2010, confessed to the decrease in demand for hypnotherapy (which is also her original speciality), a trend which forced her to invest in a new concept: 10-minute meditation CDs. Finally, Mr Takahashi, in order to keep his status above that of the 600 theta healers who were the first Japanese to graduate from Theta Healing Japan in March 2010, is planning to spend two months in the United States in the summer to acquire the highest qualifications available at the headquarters of Theta Healing. Needless to say these new credentials, excluding accommodation and daily expenses, will cost him at least \$2,000.

Finally, a third external factor corresponds to the significant role played by word of mouth. I have already shown how effective self-promotion can increase popularity by

word of mouth, but this means that the opposite phenomenon is also possible. Internet (and in some cases media) bashing as it can be called can be “deadly” for business. Mr Matsuyama, a *reinōsha* with three decades of experience, saw his clientele suddenly reduced to none, when a group of clients accused him of trying to set up a religious group. He therefore had to relocate and find a new clientele. The earlier mentioned Mr Nakamura struggled to find new customers when, on hearing of the divorce between RMMS’s Gudni Gudnasson from his wife Laurie, he decided to follow Laurie and help her to found her new “spiritual academy”, thus abandoning the network of people he had known from his studies at RMMS. Nearly every therapist at one point in his/her career seems to have been the victim of dissatisfied clients or competitive fellow therapists who used the internet and common acquaintances to try to bring down his/her business. Considering the general lack of established rules regarding ownership and copyright in Japan’s spiritual business, as reported by Ms Shibata, one can also simply copy the descriptions of therapies from the website of another practitioner and paste them onto one’s own website, while slightly changing the name of those therapies in the menu section, and still be able to do business.

We can realize, therefore, that whereas the general laxity in practising spiritual therapy may have its advantages, it also renders this business unstable and unpredictable. Since the surge in demand for spiritual therapists is fairly recent, it would be interesting to examine how many of my informants are still practising in five or ten years’ time.

Besides the external circumstances, an ethical value-factor expressed in the opinions of practitioners regarding money and the spiritual business also prevents me from reaching the quick conclusion that financial reward is their ultimate objective.

It is often said in the new spirituality culture that ‘money is energy’, a belief that is often accompanied by ethical directives. These ideas are present in the classic books read by spiritual therapists, as well as in the texts written by Japanese practitioners today. For example, Neale Donald Walsch in *Conversations with God* learns from God that it is not money that is bad, but the thoughts, which man associates with it (1995, 163). Television celebrity and spiritual counsellor Ehara Hiroyuki argues that ‘money only becomes “dirty” when we make it our objective’ (2001, 138). A similar claim is made by Ms Shibata, the owner of school Y, in one of her publications: ‘money depending on how it is used can turn to energy or poison for you and everyone else’. Although these ideas are written by people who have become wealthy by selling them, the regular spiritual therapists show a strong belief towards the responsibility that accompanies enrichment in this business. This belief was expressed in three main ways.

Firstly, in the debate I was invited to by several practitioners (see section 2.3) on 22 August 2009, I brought up at some point the example of Shri Kaleshwar and his \$500-session and asked them what they thought. While one of the attendants, Ms Momoyama, was quick to respond that money is energy and therefore he must be a very powerful therapist, hence the price, the rest of the practitioners (and later Ms Momoyama too) agreed that ‘extra earnings should be donated to a just cause’. This reflected a practice I had been observing on a few salon websites, such as that of Ms Iwakura, where a note informs the reader that ‘one part of the earnings from sessions and workshops is donated to charities’ (in Ms Iwakura’s instance, Ashinaga<sup>87</sup> and

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<sup>87</sup> Ashinaga is a non-profit organisation founded in 1969, which gives financial and emotional support to orphan children in Japan (あしなが育英会) (<http://www.ashinaga.org/e/index.php>).

Unicef Japan<sup>88</sup>). A few other practitioners openly made similar declarations on their websites, testifying to a certainly still rare but existing practice in the spiritual business.

Secondly, a much more widespread occurrence is the criticism that nearly 80 per cent of my informants made about the companies and individuals trying to take advantage of the “spiritual boom” and of people wishing to become therapists in particular. ‘I just hate those *nezumi kō* (ねずみ講, pyramid scheme) companies’ Mr Yogino told me after he had complained about people (like Ole Gabrielsen, the Danish attunement merchant mentioned earlier) who does business by selling attunements that allow the buyer to teach (=sell) them to other individuals, and also about hypnotherapy courses, such as that of Hans Tendam, who asks ¥700,000 for a one-year professional course, but charges ¥200,000 for the certificate. Ms Nishimura, the crystal healer turned angel therapist, expressing the common New Age idea that too much business will “kill” spirituality, criticized the big academies such as RMMS which include in their curriculum business courses on setting up a spiritual salon, and the magazines which live off the exorbitant prices they charge for advertisements. Mr Takahashi too, despite his clear tendency for easily earned income, seemed to believe in the existence of ethical limits to the practice of the spiritual business, and his is a very rare case of criticism directed towards the school of which he is still a student. As previously noted, in March 2010, the first 600 Japanese therapists will graduate from Theta Healing Japan. According to Mr Takahashi, one thousand applied on the day the opening of the course was announced in December 2009, but not everyone could be accepted for logistical reasons. Where the Japanese branch was thought to be devious, however, is that, despite the price of the training being set by the American headquarters at ¥80,000

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<sup>88</sup> <http://www.unicef.or.jp/>

per person, Theta Healing Japan charged an additional commission of ¥60,000 for administrative and interpreting fees. ‘Can you imagine how much money the boss of the company earned on that opening day?’ exclaimed Mr Takahashi furiously. ‘84 million yen! It’s scandalous!’

The reluctance of many spiritual therapists to associate personal wealth with the profession was depicted not only in their relative disinclination towards answering my questions on financial matters, but also, and this is the third factor ending the last argument of this section, their almost unanimous claim that, at the beginning of their career, they had hesitated to ask for any money whatsoever. This is the reason why some still keep comparatively low prices, whereas others, such as Ms Sasakawa for example, confessed to having refunded customers who remained deeply unsatisfied with her sessions. Ultimately, however, as the following statements demonstrate, money transactions in the spiritual business carry deeper meaning than a simple exchange of goods and services, as the critics of the spiritual business would have us believe.

Ms Yamato: ‘for the first three years, I used to do it for free, but then people would either start calling me in the middle of the night asking for advice, or they would just not take seriously what I suggested them to do. Then when I started asking for money (her sessions cost ¥7,500 for face-to-face and ¥7,000 over the phone), long conversations stopped and clients followed my advice. You see, money for people has more value than anything these days.’

Mr Wakafune: ‘people don’t think they will be cured if they don’t pay.’

Ms Shibata: ‘we are providing a service. You pay to get your hair cut, no? Well, why wouldn’t you pay to find some answers for your constant bad luck for example?’

#### **4.5. Conclusion: an ethical values-added market?**

More than a decade ago, Professor Shimazono, in a chapter entitled ‘The Commercialization of the Sacred’ (*sei no shōgyōka*), drew attention to the role played by the act of religious donations that expresses both individual and communitarian motives and wishes, and argued that the perceived value of religious donations for the individual had in modern times gained larger emphasis than the perceived benefits a community might gain from identical practices (1996a, 93). Consequently, the author showed that such a trend led to the marketization of religious groups in Japan, a model of religious organisations which he defined as a ‘business operation organisation-agglutination of consumers model’ (*gyōmu suikō soshiki – shōhisha setsugō moderu*) and which, according to the author, may result in three types of issue: forced or fraudulent donations, exaggerated authority of the religious leader, and aggressiveness towards non-members (*ibid*, 104-107). This argument, I believe, fits perfectly the case-studies (*Shinsekai* and Unification Church) on which the first part of Sakurai’s *Spirits and Cash* is based and it also applies to client-cult type organisations in the spiritual business, such as RMMS.

Indeed, although many of the spiritual healers I interviewed sometimes expressed a certain disdain towards those whom they consider “silly” and old-fashioned practitioners such as the *reinōsha*, most RMMS graduates were critical of all non-RMMS trained spiritual healers for their “ignorance” regarding the use of therapeutic techniques. Mr Nakamura, former member of Gudni’s organisation, warned me of the cultist behaviour of his fellow students, whereas fervent RMMS healers, such as Mr Ushimoto, accused me of mindless behaviour for going around meeting

“amateur-healers” who may, by mistake or on purpose, bring disease or even death upon me.

Nevertheless, from my observations, RMMS remains an exception and its multi-level marketing strategies are more comparable to the new religions’ methods of missionary work than to the usual practices of the companies involved in the spiritual therapy business. It was, in fact, Shimada Hiromi who noted that proselytization techniques of the new religions resemble pyramid schemes (2008, 137-140) in which faith is the commodity: the more people you convince to join the group the more faithful you are considered to be. Certain aspects of Shimada’s analysis of *Business in New Religions* may, however, be seen as proto-models of common business practices of the spiritual-type today. Among the four models identified by Shimada (ibid, 101) as being used by new religions in Japan to gather money from their followers, namely the book-club model (for example Sōka Gakkai), the donation model (for example Risshōkōsekai), the super-market model (for example Agonshū) and the *iemoto* (家元制, master-disciple) model (for example Shinnyōen), the *iemoto* model<sup>89</sup> comes closest to the common spiritual business model that can be termed as follows: ‘if you pay me to teach you, you will be able to earn money from teaching it to others’.

Sakurai Yoshihide argues that it is because the effectiveness of spiritual therapies depends on the client’s belief in their results that spiritual therapists are keen to turn their satisfied clients into professional therapists (2009b, 174). If that were true however, every Japanese person who has been taking professional courses should be a practising therapist today, an idea far from reality. No one believes that all 600 new

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<sup>89</sup> According to Shimada, the practice of *sesshin* (接心) meditation that is central to Shinnyōen beliefs requires the adept to train under the guidance of a spiritual master and pay a fee for each lesson. Those fees comprise a large part of the income of this religious group.

theta healers will open a salon, and, in fact, as the official website of Eric Pearl informs us, only 719 reconnection healers (of whom a mere 193 list their actual details) are active in Japan from the 3,200 who are supposed to have taken the training course since it was first held in 2006. The high demand and consumption in the spiritual business therefore is explained by two different reasons that will lead us to discuss the significance of the phenomenon for Japanese society in the following chapters.

First of all, Sakurai misses the point made by researchers who convincingly demonstrate that the spiritual business is not the marketization of the occulture; it is the occulture that functions as a market or, more precisely, a fair. Guy Redden, in this respect, argues that the Western phenomenon of the New Age develops according to a market model:

If “seekership” is the dominant mode of participation, it is—in material terms—primarily effected through selection and consumption of commodified goods and services made available by New Age businesses. Businesses actively co-operate to market options, establishing and contributing to the costs of fora which promote them side-by-side to consumers. These key commercial intermediary spaces actively sponsor the multiple affiliations of participants (2005, 240).

In this instance, from *supicon* to RMMS and even to the 20m<sup>2</sup> apartment where Ms Fumada teaches her channelling classes, all these events correspond to these intermediary spaces where, as Redden describes, gatekeepers such as editors, event organisers, teachers and the like uptake and regulate, while simultaneously innovating, occultural informational resources they receive from their predecessors or other gatekeepers (ibid, 238).



Secondly, the consumers of these resources can be seen on two levels. On the superficial level, there are those whom Mr Takahashi called ‘spiritual-*gokko*’ (spiritual make-believe) and who fit perfectly Carrete’s and King’s thesis of the corporate takeover of religion: ‘buying and selling “spirituality” has become the brand name for the act of selling off the assets of “old time” religion. Religious artefacts and language have “cachet value” for a society of isolated individuals hungry for packaged meaning’ (Carrette and King, 2005, 125). On a deeper level, however, and this concerns particularly the spiritual therapists themselves, rather than cold-hearted entrepreneurs who are forced to be competitive and innovative in a very demanding market, the majority of these professionals have entered the spiritual business because they believe in the values accompanying a “spiritual” lifestyle, values which are clumsily expressed in their discussions and in their writings, and which Paul Heelas identifies as ‘humanistic/expressivistic’. He says

I have been suggesting that a politics of expressivistic, humanistic values, underpinned or informed by the sacred in the form of inner-life spirituality, serves as a form of counter-culture to combat the sins of capitalism: a counter-culture strengthened by virtue of well-qualified people leaving their mainstream, often person-centred occupations to become practitioners (2008, 209).

In the following chapters, I will examine how these Japanese practitioners are countering established Japanese social rules, how their rise can be seen through the lens of wider social phenomena in Japan today and how eventually these phenomena can be rendered meaningful in Japanese culture using the now frequently versed argument that the quest for this-worldly benefits is considered to be at the core of Japanese religious activities (Reader and Tanabe, 1998).

## **Chapter 5: On Spiritual Therapy**

In section 1.4, I drew attention to Shimazono Susumu's argument that the new spirituality culture is interrelated, like two sides of a coin (Shimazono, 2002, 17), with another phenomenon, called therapy-culture. This concept of 'therapy-culture', according to Koike Yasushi refers to the increasing presence and use in contemporary society of psychological and psychotherapeutic ideas and practices (2007a, 7). In other words, it corresponds to the rise in popularity of psychologism (*shinrishugi*) in all areas of daily activity: from the obvious examples of the surge of counselling services and of self-development seminars in education and work environments, to the widespread use of alternative therapies such as aromatherapy and reflexology, and perhaps to the less evident fascination of television audiences with programmes in which celebrities "come out" on their issues, or the popularity of autobiographies of individuals such as serial killers. If this process of psychologization and, by extension, medicalisation of our lives has become an 'alternative to religion' (as Koike, mirroring Shimazono's argument, comments [ibid, v]), the purpose of the introduction to this chapter is to show how researchers explain this phenomenon before I delve into explaining the place which spiritual therapists occupy within it.

The appellation 'spiritual therapists' was not a random choice. Starting with the definition of spirituality (see chapter 1), it is clear that "the spiritual" has expanded outside the institutional religious domain expressing concerns over health, education, and social and political participation (King, 1996, 346). This is of course not a novelty since several centuries ago, before the advent of secularism, religion was playing a similar role. But, it seems that today spirituality has established a particular connection

with health and healing: in Japan, for example, it has been found that the word spirituality was first used in a clinical setting (Taniyama et al., 2004 cited in Kashio [2010, 38]). The reason for this intimate relationship can be found in changes over the last century in the concept and use of health care. The ‘golden age of scientific medicine’, which spanned 60 years, from 1910 to 1970 (Turner, 2004, xiv), reached a turning point when health, for the first time, came to be defined as more than the mere absence of disease or infirmity<sup>90</sup>. This meant that striving for a better condition of health became a right for the modern individual. But, more importantly, it also signified a “turn inwards” to explore and attempt to discover what there is to “fix” through health care. Contributing therefore to the phenomenon of the subjective turn (see section 1.2) which characterised several social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and which eventually led to the rise of a new spirituality culture, this transformation of the concept of health prepared the ground for three major elements in the development and consolidation of today’s therapy culture.

Firstly, there has been the appearance of medical consumerism, which, as Arthur W. Frank claims, makes of health the contemporary basis of that which Max Weber argued religion traditionally reinforced: ‘the theodicy of good fortune’ (2002, 27). Weber had remarked that ‘in treating suffering as a symptom of odiousness in the eyes of the gods (...) religion has psychologically met a very general need. The fortunate (...) wants to be convinced that he has a right to his good fortune (...) that he “deserves” it, and above all, that he deserves it in comparison with others’ (cited in *ibid*). Consequently, Frank proposes that medical consumerism instantiates this good fortune in the body making the individual believe that one is responsible for one’s

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<sup>90</sup> See <http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html> (visited 2 August 2010).

health and thus deserves it (ibid). Such an explanation of the effects of health care consumerism, namely the shift of authority from without to within (Heelas, 1996, 82), supports the theory that a sacralisation of the individual has been under way and thus allows us to link spirituality to the therapy culture.

Secondly, the more the individual has focused on improving his or her health, the more it has become obvious that ‘health care is a matter of cultural modelling rather than scientific truth’ (Cassidy, 1996, 31). In a sense, people’s health expectations surpassed what scientific medicine and the pace of its research innovation had to, and could, offer and started turning towards old and new types of therapies and healing which have more recently been grouped under the name of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). The great number and diversity of therapies called CAM, together with their constant evolution, renders a definition of the term very difficult (Kelner and Wellman, 2003, 3), but in a general sense, ‘complementary and alternative medicine is a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices and products that are not generally considered part of conventional medicine’ (National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, 2010). In the first section of this chapter, I will show that many of the spiritual therapies I encountered in my fieldwork can be categorized under the rubric of CAM. Yet, as I will demonstrate, spiritual therapists almost never use the corresponding Japanese term (*hokan daitai iryō*, 補完代替医療).

As Ernst *et al.* stress, the concept of CAM itself has undergone changes, from its popularity as an “alternative” to scientific medicine that was losing its appeal in the 1970s and 1980s, to a focus on its “complementarity” to conventional medicine as the use of CAM increased, and finally to becoming one of the two components of a new, “integrative” medicine claiming to offer the best of both worlds (2008, 2). The

evolution of the meaning of CAM which has accompanied its commodification and professionalization and the integration of its experience/emotion/holistic-based approach to therapy, leads us to the third element in the establishment of the therapy culture: the ritualization of health-seeking behaviour. To use Victor Turner's classic concept (1967), the contemporary individual constantly finds him/herself in a liminal status, betwixt and between the condition of illness and health, the latter having become harder to define, yet its attainment promising to end the conflicts of identity, values and goals raised by life in contemporary society.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the relevance of the above arguments in Japanese society by showing firstly how Japan's spiritual therapists can be located within what has been called a CAM social movement (Goldner, 2004, 11) even if they cannot thereby be called CAM therapists. Secondly, I will discuss in sequence the three most popular types of spiritual therapy based on my participant observation and attempt to explain how they are meant to function, how they in fact function and why they appeal to Japanese people. In conclusion, I will develop the argument that, despite claims by practitioners that their techniques are different from older therapeutic traditions, the functionality of spiritual therapy is still based on narratives, a subject that will lead me, in chapter 6, to discuss the ideology behind the practice of spiritual therapy in present day Japan.

### **5.1. Spiritual therapy in CAM: fundamental concepts of healing**

The word *hokan daitai iriyō* (CAM in Japanese) was never mentioned in my interviews with spiritual therapists and it is rarely found on websites related to the spiritual business. As Tanabe Shintarō notes, the concept has only been used by specialists and may have been overshadowed by the long-established recognition of Japan's

mainstream herbal medicine system called *kanpō* (漢方) (Tanabe and Shimazono, 2002, 265). In fact, in his thorough overview of CAM policy and practice in Japan, Suzuki Nobutaka reports that parts of *kanpō* and acupuncture are covered by health insurance in Japan, and that 70 per cent of medical doctors practice some form of complementary medicine (almost always herbal medicine), while 65.6<sup>91</sup> per cent of Japanese adults are users of CAM including *kanpō* (2004). Considering the existence of government-approved and licensed educational institutions of moxibustion, Japanese traditional massage (*An-ma*), finger pressure (*shiatsu*) and judotherapy (Yamada, 2005, 193), there are arguably very few practitioners of these therapies who would call themselves alternative or even feel part of a new spirituality community. Only three of my 68 informants had attended such institutions: Mr Nakamura held a chiropractor's license, Ms Kawamura had studied acupuncture and massage therapy at New York's Swedish Institute<sup>92</sup> and Mr Kobama graduated from a *setai*<sup>93</sup> 3-year college<sup>94</sup>.

It seems therefore that the concept of CAM in Japan has come primarily to identify the officially (or nearly so) licensed practices, whereas the remaining techniques have been assigned to a marginal category that I choose to call 'spiritual therapies'. The administration of herbal supplements at the outpatient services of university clinics which have recently been promoting CAM therapies (see Yanagawa, 2008) strengthens, I believe, the above argument, but it also demonstrates that Japanese

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<sup>91</sup> This finding is based on a sample of 1,167 patients of Tokyo Medical University Hospital.

<sup>92</sup> <http://www.swedishinstitute.edu/>

<sup>93</sup> The therapy is said to have been developed by Noguchi Haruchika (1911-1976) from a mix of chiropractic, osteopathic and Japanese martial arts techniques.

<sup>94</sup> Kyokuri setai senmon gakuin (<http://www.kyokuri.com/>).

medical institutions and CAM associations have made great efforts to invest in research<sup>95</sup> on such therapies (Suzuki, 2004). However, my objective here is not to discuss the state of CAM in Japan, but to use the categorization of CAM as it was developed in the West in order to reveal the underlying principles which link spiritual therapy to the therapy culture, and which help to explain the function of those techniques which I have chosen to examine in the following sections of this chapter.

In the literature, we can find a range of typologies of CAM therapies (see Kelner and Wellman [2003, 6-7] for a brief review), but the best known categorization remains that of the US National Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), which I summarize below (Ernst et al., 2008, 2-3).

Table 5.1 Categories of CAM

Category	Example therapies
<u>Alternative medical systems</u> : these are complete systems of theory and practice.	homeopathic medicine, naturopathic medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurveda.
<u>Mind-body interventions</u> : a variety of techniques designed to enhance the mind's capacity to affect bodily function and symptoms	meditation, prayer, mental healing, and therapies that use creative outlets such as art, music, or dance.
<u>Biologically-based therapies</u> : use substances found in nature, such as herbs, foods, and vitamins	dietary supplements, herbal products.

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<sup>95</sup> 277 of the 827 articles published in the database of the *Journal of Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* contained the word 'Japan' (as of 29 April 2010).

<u>Manipulative and body-based methods:</u> based on manipulation and/or movement of one or more parts of the body.	chiropractic or osteopathic manipulation, massage.
<u>Energy therapies:</u> involve the use of energy fields (including those purportedly surrounding and penetrating the body, or electromagnetic fields)	<i>qigong, reiki</i> , therapeutic touch.

If we compare the NCCAM's typology with that introduced in figure 3.2, we can see clearly that the hypno-type, spiritual-type and business-type techniques can all be categorised as 'mind-body interventions', because they all rely on the assumed ability of the mind to influence the body and its environment. As for the remaining categories (nature-type, oriental-type and healing-type techniques), they clearly belong to 'energy therapies', although a few of the healing-type techniques could be said to comprise a combination of 'manipulative and body-based methods' and 'energy therapies'. These observations point to a very significant conclusion: the fact that the vast majority of what I have defined as 'spiritual therapies' relies entirely on the belief that they play a functional role. Indeed, contrary to the centuries-old philosophical traditions (Ayurveda, for example), and the practices requiring particular knowledge (herbalism) or skill (massage), the spiritual therapies, because they only rely on belief, are quicker to learn and to apply. A first implication that we can draw from this conclusion is that, in addition to the weakness of such therapies in passing the standard method of evaluation (the randomized critical trial<sup>96</sup> [Ernst, 2003]; hence their marginality among Japanese

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<sup>96</sup> RCT is the most commonly used type of experiment in order to evaluate the efficacy of a drug or health care service. In the case of CAM, a typical RCT will involve two group of individuals inflicted of the same disease which that particular CAM is tested against, one group receiving the CAM treatment and the other receiving a placebo. It has to be noted that RCTs have been widely criticised in the literature



CAM), their entirely faith-based character influences how they are practised, consumed and adapted to the needs of contemporary Japanese.

Undoubtedly all CAM therapies rely on assumptions regarding the human body which are absent from biomedicine and which are based on faith alone. These assumptions are the features which identify the CAM domain, as Bonnie O'Connor explains (2003, 50), and thus a discussion of them should precede any further analysis of spiritual therapies. In Table 5.2., I review O'Connor's seven fundamental beliefs held by CAM practitioners and users (ibid, 50-51).

Table 5.2 Fundamental assumptions of CAM therapies regarding the body

Belief	Explanation
(1) Interrelation of body, mind and spirit	Health and illness incorporate all these aspects of the person, thus healing has to take into account all three, their interconnection with each other and with the wider environment.
(2) Health as harmony and balance	Harmony and balance involve various aspects of the person, bodily substances and essential qualities, and frequently extend to relationships between the individual and the external world.
(3) Vitalism	The human body is animated and sustained by a force/energy which may be connected with a universal cosmic source; restoration of its proper freedom and function promotes healing.

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in recent years for various reasons, the most important of which is the artificially created homogeneity in the trial groups, which are built through rigorous selection processes that eventually make the research subjects unrepresentative of "real" patients. This is the problem of generalizability or 'external validity' (Lock and Nguyen, 2010, 185).

(4)Self-healing and self-regulating capacity of the body	The body's vital energy bestows these capacities upon it.
(5)Importance of "energy"	Besides the vital force, energy fields in and around the body may interact with other humans and the environment; negative energies cause illness and positive ones promote healing.
(6)Attention to underlying causes	Treatment of underlying causes is often of equal or greater importance than treatment of symptoms and usually translates into restoring a mental imbalance within the body or between the person and the environment.
(7)Integrative moral tone	Moral elements such as a belief in the inherent goodness of Nature and a sense of responsibility for right behaviour and health-protecting actions complete the belief in the existence of harmony.

These seven beliefs about the functioning of the body and illness aetiology have strongly influenced the ideology and cosmology of spiritual therapies, and we can expect them to appear very frequently in the sayings and writings of the practitioners who were the important subjects in my field research. Their particular significance, as I have argued above, in the application of a spiritual therapy-type of CAM is demonstrated in their explicit presence on the first page of the spiritual therapists' websites where they function both as an advertisement of the practitioner's "openness of mind" and a warning to the visitor who is about to enter "the world of the spiritual". As evidence of this observation, the following seven sentences are among the very first

words one can read on the first page of the informants' websites (I have marked in brackets the number which corresponds to O'Connor's fundamental assumption):

Ms Momoko: 'We are comprised of body, mind and soul' (*watashitachi wa kokoro, karada, tamashii no sonzai desu.*)[1]

Ms Tonoda: 'Would you like to experience spiritual healing that adjusts mind, body and spirit?' (*kokoro to karada to tamashii o totonoeru supirichuaru hiiringu o taiken shimasenka?*) [2]

Ms Saeda: 'It's a powerful healing that can release the energy of love and happiness which breathe in the source of everyone's existence' (*daremo ga seimei no minamoto ni ikizuku ai to yorokobi no enerugii o kaihō suru koto ga dekiru pawafuru na hiiringu desu.*) [3]

Ms Sasakawa: 'You possess the power to solve those problems' (*anata wa sono mondai o kaiketsu suru chikara o motteimasu.*) [4]

Ms Suzuki: 'I "read" your total state through vision, aura and your energy status, and I carefully explain their meaning to you' (*enerugii no jōtai ya, ōra, bijon o tōshite, ima no jōtai o sōgōteki ni riidingu shi, sono imi o teinei ni yomikaite ikimasu.*) [5]

Ms Kikuko: 'I would love for a past-life reading session to become the opportunity for you to gain awareness of your real self and walk in life stronger' (*kakose riidingu no sesshon ga honrai no anata ni kizuki, jinsei o chikarazuyoku arukidasu kikkake to nareba saiwai desu.*)[6]

Ms Nakada: 'The world of spirits envelops us, one by one, with a love deeper than humans can imagine, and, in so doing, it grants us free will' (*reikai wa ningen no sōzō o*

*koeru hodo no fukai ai de, watashitachi hitori hitori o tsutsumikonde kudasari, sono ai yueni, watashitachi ni jiyūishi o ataete kudasatte imasu.)* [7]

A theory which is particularly relevant for spiritual therapies generally and for Japan in particular is that all beliefs regarding the body in CAM therapies today can be said to stem from vitalism. As Kaptchuk explains, vitalism arose within the academic elite of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe as a response to the mechanistic and atomistic physiochemical reductionism of the scientific revolution (1996, 36). Anton Mesmer's (1734-1815) undeniable influence in the development of this belief in vitalism is further strengthened by the realization that, not only were the founders of osteopathic and chiropractic techniques<sup>97</sup> originally magnetic healers of the mesmeric tradition, but also the two categories of CAM to which the spiritual therapies belong (namely mind-body interventions and energy therapies) can be traced back to 'higher' and 'lower' mesmerism respectively (ibid, 37).

Spiritual counselling, channelling, and aura reading, for example, consider this vital force as an "incorporeal power", hinting at a higher mesmeric interpretation which, fused with earlier occult traditions, established the practice of clairvoyance, telepathy, communication with spirits, hypnotism and so on, while also giving birth to the New Thought<sup>98</sup> idea that disease stems from wrong thinking. *Reiki*, crystal healing, and meta-physiotherapy, on the other hand, take on a lower mesmeric interpretation based on the understanding that this vital force as a "physical agency" can be manipulated or

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<sup>97</sup> Andrew Still (1828-1917) and D.D. Palmer (1845-1913) respectively.

<sup>98</sup> The New Thought movement was founded by Phineas P. Quimby (1802-1866).

transferred at will from body to body or from a cosmic source to the body, and also incorporated into massage techniques.

The particular significance of the concept of vitalism for Japan is related to two phenomena. Firstly, as the country opened its doors to the West in the second half of the nineteenth century, importing, among others, various spiritualist activities<sup>99</sup>, Western vitalism met with the Japanese tradition of self-cultivation (*shūyō*, 修養) which, having assimilated the neo-Confucianism of the Edo period (1603-1868), came to form the ideological basis for the subsequent healing, new religious and educational movements (Tanabe, Shimazono and Yumiya, 1999, 275). In chapter 6, I will examine this ideological element in more detail. However, in this chapter it is the connection between vitalism and another, second element of Japanese culture that is most relevant. Indeed, I argue that today, spiritual therapies, each with their own complex use of vitalism, are practised in a way that addresses and even reinforces the use of physiomorphism in Japanese illness causation.

Borrowing the term from Lévi-Strauss, who explains that magic consists of a naturalization of human actions or ‘a physiomorphism of man’ (in contrast to religion which is a humanization of natural laws, or ‘anthropomorphism of man’), Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, in her seminal work *Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan: An Anthropological View*, suggests that Japanese illness aetiology demonstrates a preference for physiological (human and non-human) agents over psychological ones, and thus promotes an optimistic mode of thought that believes in the capacity of

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<sup>99</sup> For example, accounts of hypnotism in Japan appear from 1871-72 (Tanabe, 1999, 14) and the game of table turning (the ancestor of the ouija board) is said to have been taught to Japanese prostitutes by American soldiers in the late 1870s (Ichiyanagi, 1994, 7).

humans to intervene in natural determinism (1984, 86)<sup>100</sup>. Ohnuki-Tierney demonstrates her argument using the evidence for the strong institutionalization of mental health care, the continuous popularity of protective amulets and fortune-telling and the high consumption of medical drugs by the Japanese (ibid.). Her theory would seem, however, to contrast with the earlier observations of psychologism in Japan. Does this mean that there is no therapy culture in Japan? In the following sections, I will demonstrate that, on the contrary spiritual therapists often succeed in combining both worlds, in what can be called a ‘physiomorphic psychologization’ of spiritual techniques.

## **5.2. Hypno-type therapies: past-life therapy**

Having established a conceptual framework for the practice of spiritual therapy, I turn now to a description of such sessions. It is of course impossible to describe the characteristics of the dozens of therapies which I encountered or heard of during my fieldwork. But, faithful to my informants’ understanding, I will consider one for each of the three categories that are the most popular and most practised types of therapy in Japan today: the hypno-type, the spiritual-type and the healing-type (see figure 3.2).

A particularly interesting session is that of past-life therapy (*zense ryōhō*, 前世療法), a practice that had reached its peak of popularity when I started my research, but has reportedly since lost its appeal (see section 4.4). Mr Yogino who “treated” me in his salon on 14 August 2009, advertises his practice on his website as follows:

past-life therapy is only one type of hypnotherapy but its  
tremendous healing effects have almost made it synonymous

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<sup>100</sup> Similar arguments have been advanced in studies of traditional Chinese medicine, but I choose here to focus on Japan. See (Leslie, 1976) for further information.

with hypnotherapy itself (...) The advice you receive from the usual counselling, fortune-telling or spiritual reading sessions may be good, but ultimately they are words uttered by someone else (...) In past-life therapy you get to experience and bring about your healing by yourself (...) Healing the wounds of your past life can have immense effects on your present life (...) you don't need to believe in reincarnation (...) most important is what you experience during the session.

Mr Yogino rightly points out that past-life therapy has become the standard type offered by hypnotherapists in Japan today. Its appeal is explained by the popularity of the question 'who was I in a previous life?' which is also often present in the spiritual-type techniques (see section 5.3). Past-life therapy became famous in New Age settings through Dr Brian L. Weiss' book *Many Lives, Many Masters* (*Zense ryōhō*, 1996[1988]) in which he recounts how one of his patients, Catherine, started remembering in a hypnotic state traumatic experiences of previous lives and how these explained her current anxiety problems. Since then, other hypnotherapists have appeared with their own regression methods. Among those who also conduct seminars in Japan, Hans Tendam (under whom Mr Yogino learned his practice) and Trisha Caetano, both based in Amsterdam, were frequently mentioned by my informants.

Sitting back on a comfortable chair with a towel covering the lower half of my body, I waited for Mr Yogino to close the curtains, dim the lights and sit on a stool next to me. At his request, I relaxed, started breathing slowly, and closed my eyes. What follows is a summary of our subsequent conversation.

Mr Yogino: 'Imagine yourself on your bed. How do you see yourself? Sitting? Lying down?'

Me: 'Lying down.'

Mr Yogino: 'Ok. Get up, look around the room and describe it. Are the windows or the door open? What do you see?'

Me: 'Everything is closed.'

Mr Yogino: 'Walk to the kitchen and open the fridge. What's inside?'

Me: 'Coke and cheese.'

Mr Yogino: 'You see! You saw this yourself. I did not tell you there is coke and cheese in the fridge. Some people say they find an elephant in the fridge.'

Ok. Now imagine yourself in a situation you really like and where you feel good. Where are you?'

Me: 'On the beach.'

The conversation continued with Mr Yogino constantly asking me to describe my surroundings, insisting that my responses should come instinctively (*chokkan de*).

Mr Yogino: 'Ok. Stop swimming. Come back out and if you feel ready, go home. Who's there?'

Me: 'My mother and my sister.'

Mr Yogino: 'Can you see their faces?'

Me: 'No.'

Mr Yogino: 'What are you doing?'

Me: 'Watching TV and getting ready to eat.'

Mr Yogino: 'Where's your father?'

Me: 'Outside.'



Mr Yogino: 'Call him. Can you see his face?'

Me: 'Yes.'

Mr Yogino: 'Does he resemble anyone you know?'

Me: 'Yes, my father.'

Mr Yogino: 'Is the TV black and white?'

Me: '...Yes.'

Mr Yogino: 'So, maybe you're in the 1920s!<sup>101</sup> Ok, now think of a situation where something happened (*dekigoto no atta toki*). Where are you?'

This last question was asked four times with an implication that the situations I describe each time are (or should be) in chronological order. Personally, I found it really hard to come up with these descriptions and I think that Mr Yogino sensed this. To summarize my four answers: I first "saw myself" at 30-years old driving a bus on the island of Crete, then I was a 40-year old businessman coming back by car to Scotland from Switzerland where I had just closed a deal. Next, at 50, I was travelling to the United States where I drove again cross country, and finally at 70 years-old, I saw myself under a tree feeling sad.

Mr Yogino: 'Now imagine that you die. Where does your soul go? To the sky or to some other place?'

Me: 'Nowhere. It just stays under the tree.'

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<sup>101</sup> According to about.com, there were 200 television sets in use worldwide in 1936. ([http://inventors.about.com/od/tstartinventions/a/Television\\_Time\\_3.htm](http://inventors.about.com/od/tstartinventions/a/Television_Time_3.htm), visited on 6 May 2010).

Mr Yogino: 'Ok. Return to your room and imagine that you are facing that self who has just died. Does he have any advice for you regarding, let's say, relationships?'

Me: 'He's angry.'

Mr Yogino: 'Can you see his eyes? Are they human?'

Me: 'Yes. He's just probably always been lonely.'

Mr Yogino: 'Tell him that you are not and that you have a girlfriend now.' (Mr Yogino checked this information with me right before he said it)

Me: 'He says that I will never marry.'

Mr Yogino: 'Hug him and tell him that you are going to be alright.'

The session lasted one hour. I do not remember having come out with a different mindset, although the session could be qualified as unusual since no specific issue was targeted, a prerequisite that Mr Yogino and other hypnotherapists always follow with their clients. I do not believe that agreeing beforehand on a problem to solve would have made a difference in my case, but, before I analyse past-life therapy, it is worth looking at other clients' testimonials. Arguably, unless I had interviewed the clients themselves, it is impossible to find transcripts of sessions from which the client left dissatisfied. But, since I seek to analyse precisely the way a past-life therapy would be believed to work, a book such as *Welcome to Past Life Therapy (Zense ryōhō e yōkoso, 2005)* represents a perfect source of information. The author, neurosurgeon Okuyama Terumi, owns a clinic in Osaka and promotes integrative medicine. He specializes in past-life therapy and belongs to the entourage of Iida Fumihiko, one of the leading figures of Japanese occulture.

In his publication, Okuyama provides ten transcripts of particularly successful sessions that present exactly the same structure as Mr Yogino's: after an initial relaxation time, the patient is asked to imagine him or herself in a situation and describe the surroundings and the people he or she meets. Then the patient is asked to jump in time twice or thrice until the time of death when (s)he climbs to the sky and meets a dead relative or acquaintance or until the time the patient faces the dead-self of his/her previous life. Closure comes when the patient finds the reason for their present distress in something (s)he did or endured in a previous life. As an example, the first case of a woman with constant headaches is solved when she realizes that, in a previous life, she was a man named Marko, a Christian priest, stoned to death (hence the headaches) by the adepts of a new faith group that had invaded his village. Not only was the woman's health problem healed, but she also went home with the conviction that her weakness to stand up for herself in life so far had been inherited from Marko's inability to promote his faith to his fellow villagers.

Past life therapy combines all the elements of the higher mesmeric tradition: the vital energy as an incorporeal power allows the patient to travel in time, talk to the dead and other spirits which sometimes (as in the accounts of both Weiss and Okuyama) even inform the therapist of events to come or to perform miraculous healing. From a CAM-based conception of the body, the connection between mind, body and spirit is established from realizing that the physical symptoms are not only related to the real events of past lives but also to wrong mind-sets and things left unsaid to people now long dead. The moral tone of the stories, such as forgiving those who did wrong to you, gives significance to the underlying causes, and the past life therapy itself is the ultimate proof of the self-healing capacity of the body. Finally, and most importantly for the

Japanese, beyond the obvious physiomorphism of illness causality (the headache is due to a past life's deeds), even the psychological element, for example the fact that Okuyama's client had so far lacked self-assertion in her life, takes a physiomorphic form in Marko's weakness in his job that eventually led to his death. Using Ohnuki-Tierney's argument, this physiomorphism 'provides a pragmatic solution to problems in life by assigning responsibility for the outcome of one's endeavours to a neutral party' (1984, 83).

To discuss the effectiveness of past life therapy, however, we need first to consider why it may not be effective. Nicholas P. Spanos's 20-year research in socio-cognitive psychology attained ground-breaking results that deny the existence of a hypnotic state or any other altered state of consciousness. For Spanos, hypnotherapies and psychodynamic therapies that seek illness aetiology in the patient's past merely condition them to create, using available information, 'a social impression that is congruent with their perception of situational demands, with the self-understandings they have learned to adopt, and with the interpersonal goals they are attempting to achieve' (1996, 3). If we look at my session with Mr Yogino, we realize that several assumptions and suggestive questions assisted me in creating, even consciously, a past life. The most obvious assumption consists in considering everything I am asked to describe as a past-life event. This conditioning stems from the simple fact that, if a session is called 'past life therapy', the client submitted to it is bound to see their past life.

On a second closer look, Mr Yogino asked two types of questions: open-ended questions that were meant to convince me of the power of hypnotherapy, while ignoring the fact that my answers expressed my own wishes: for example, the contents of the

fridge, the location where I felt good (my actual home is in Crete) or my love for driving. The other type included strongly suggestive questions whose wording was aimed at defining my responses as involuntary: ‘is the television black and white?’, ‘what age are you now?’ or ‘does your dead self have any advice to give you on relationships?’ Additionally, Mr Yogino’s insistence that responses should be fast and intuitive (*chokkan de*) relies on the important assumption that the connections between events is entirely determined by the past experiences and thus cannot be influenced by the therapist, a misconception that remains the main critique against Freud’s psychoanalytic technique of ‘free association’ on which all these hypnotherapies are essentially based (see MacMillan, 1991).

We can also assume that a better prepared client with a genuine issue and will to solve it, equipped with information on past life therapy and familiar with other clients’ testimonials widely available on the internet and the shelves of Japanese bookshops, is fully capable of coming up with a “past life” far more complex and relevant to their situation than I was. But this does not mean that, apart from the carefully placed suggestive questions, Mr Yogino’s input is minimal. His worry that the eyes of my past life self were not human refers directly to his own experiences of being possessed in the past and of having patients who had been possessed by an evil spirit during a session. In that regard, I remember clearly that my very first question in the interview concerned the purpose of the plant on the floor and of the yellow cloth hanging on the wall (see figure 5.1) which Mr Yogino revealed to be a type of *feng-shui* protecting the salon from evil spirits.

Figure 5.1 Mr Yogino's office (picture figuring on his website)



Ms Iwada, another hypnotherapist among my informants, focuses on a different aspect of this type of therapy: she believes that information gained from seeing one's past life can assist the client in making better choices in the present life. This belief is based on her own experience of having seen the face of her husband in a hypnotherapy session two years before she actually met him. An argument that stems from such observations is that the popularity of spiritual therapists depends on the affinity their clients feel with the original elements the practitioners insert, consciously or not, into sessions which otherwise always follow the same pattern. The more these original elements appeal to the expectations of the public, the more successful the therapist will be. This recognition leads us to discuss, in the next section, the most famous type of spiritual therapy, the spiritual-type. Before that, I will briefly return to the supposition that, despite its obvious illusionary claims, past life therapy may provoke often temporarily (if no physiological cause is implicated) positive effects. This supposition is

based on the conclusions reached by Spanos's experiments in hypnotherapeutic techniques which were framed as follows:

[P]eople are much more likely to change their ideas in the direction of a message if, instead of simply repeating the message verbatim, they become actively involved in improvising arguments that support the message. When people improvise in support of a particular idea, they focus on personal experiences, and generate arguments, that are tailored to convince themselves that the idea is true (1996, 103).

Spanos's findings not only address Okuyama's claim that his patient's headache stopped after she convinced herself that it was due to Marko's stoning; they also hint at the significance of the theory advanced at the beginning of this chapter regarding the conceptualization of consumption of spiritual therapies as a ritual narrative. I will now develop this idea in the remainder of the chapter.

### **5.3 Spiritual-type therapies: spiritual counselling**

The process of psychologization becomes even more evident in the case of spiritual-type therapies. The reason resides in the fact that, whereas hypno-type techniques are generally based on Western-imported, psychoanalytically-derived therapies (it is well known that Freud started his research by experimenting on hypnosis), Ehara's spiritual counselling can be said to have evolved from traditional Japanese shamanistic practices, which have already been the subject of extensive investigation (see section 1.4). The ideological evolution in this domain will be considered in chapter 6, but, here, I shall focus first on the technical changes characterizing spiritual counselling, and then the debate on how these spiritual-type therapies are believed to function.

Ehara Hiroyuki's spiritual counselling has undoubtedly become a point of reference for most spiritual-type techniques to the extent that several spiritual therapists claim to have entered the spiritual business after watching the television show *The Fountain of Aura* (see section 3.1.). As Koike Yasushi (Koike, 2007b, 14-17) explains, the pattern of the show was always the same. The talk-show format centres on the celebrity-guest's life-course as explained by him or herself and interpreted by Ehara using three techniques: reading the colour of the aura of the guest to find out about their personality<sup>102</sup>, "seeing" the guest's past life to explain their current life (skilful singers for example tend to have been musicians in their previous existences), and finally, listening to or seeing the messages of the spirits (among which sometimes appears the guest's guardian spirit [*shugorei*] to transmit moral messages such as 'nothing occurs by chance', 'hardships become lessons', 'you like your job because you were meant to', or 'those who protected you during your life continue to look after you beyond death').

The spiritual-type techniques listed in section 3.2. often consist of alternative versions of one or combinations of both of Ehara's methods: reading - for example, aura reading, rose reading, energy reading, *codan* reading, spirit reading, past life reading, and communicating – for example, channelling, *kotodama* counselling, voice healing message. Indeed, my session with spiritual advisor Mr Suzuki who was introduced in chapter 1, presented many similarities with Ehara's counselling.

The first time I met Mr Suzuki, the people who introduced him to me had convinced me that I should "play" the client and refrain from asking him for an interview. However, the willingness with which Mr Suzuki, after our first session,

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<sup>102</sup> This part of Ehara's counselling is said to have disappeared from the programme from Autumn 2006.



accepted, not only to talk about his work, but also to introduce me to two of his clients proved my friends wrong. Mr Suzuki's cooperativeness showed how clients of spiritual therapists probably think of them as more secretive and marginal than they actually are. To some degree this has to do with the nature of the power relationship the practitioner has to maintain with clients, yet it also implies that clients consume not only the therapies, but also the marginality and/or originality of such therapies. This observation is directly connected to the attractiveness of spiritual therapy, which I will discuss in chapter 6.

I met Mr Suzuki on an autumn afternoon in front of the east exit of Shinjuku station. While he inquired into our common acquaintance's situation (my friend had seen Mr Suzuki because he could marry), we walked east and entered a quiet coffee shop where he usually conducts his sessions. As we sat down and ordered our drinks, Mr Suzuki asked me to write my name in *katakana* on the back of his business card which he then put on the table before passing his hand several times above it.

Mr Suzuki: 'What is the issue, then?'

Me: 'I am currently studying at a British university and I am worried about my professional future?'

That was the longest sentence I uttered for the next hour. My inquiry triggered a flow of information which Mr Suzuki claimed to see (he often referred to the English word "vision") first hesitantly, and then, as I seemed often to acquiesce, with passion. Subjects varied: my health – 'exercise more the lower half of the body', 'don't eat too much Japanese food because it causes you stomach-aches', my personality – 'you are shy', 'you are too stressed', my likes and dislikes – 'you don't like England', 'you like the countryside', and, of course, my future – 'I see two versions of you: one is getting a

job directly after graduation and the other one has to teach English part-time before finding better employment.’

The first half of the session can definitely be described as spiritual. In Ehara’s style, Mr Suzuki saw one, then three guardian spirits floating above my head: an old lady with curly blond, long hair who wanted me to live in England forever, an old, bald man with a long grey beard, wearing a military uniform who encouraged me to be proud of what I have done so far, and a healthy looking, slightly overweight lady with blond hair who worried about my health and gave the advice previously mentioned. Next, Mr Suzuki had a vision of my past life as a school instructor teaching young Japanese children to read and write. This first part was clearly meant to establish that Mr Suzuki’s supernatural abilities allowed him an unmistakable insight; an insight that, in my case, seemed to be based on certain stereotypes about foreigners (ancestors are all blond even though I am not, the dislike of Japanese cuisine), and conclusions drawn from my appearance (shy, exercise lower half of body) and words (stressed).

In the second half of his counselling, Mr Suzuki stopped explaining the source of his information and delved into moral statements, much as in Ehara’s show, such as ‘if you try hard, everything will work out’, ‘be grateful to your ancestors because they protect you’, ‘be grateful to people who have done you wrong for teaching you who not to become.’ The session ended with the concluding advice: ‘don’t worry; you can do it, but don’t know it yet.’

According to Horie Norichika, the psychologization of spiritual counselling can be distinguished by the four elements which comprise such sessions: building a relationship of trust using the ability to see spirits (rapport), seeking reasons for present problems in the past (trauma), changing the perspective on present issues reveals the

good aspects of one's life (re-framing) and reassuring the client of their protection by guardian spirits and of the location of the ultimate solution within themselves (empowerment) (Horie, 2006, 245). Therefore, in addition to the higher mesmeric interpretation of vitalism which we can witness in the practice of spiritual counselling, the most significant point stressed by Ehara and those he has inspired is the ability of the clients to find the answers to their own worries inside themselves. This fundamental concept of CAM is what Ehara Hiroyuki seems to consider as the main difference between himself and his predecessors, the *reinōsha* who tend to seek materialistic wealth by scaring their clients with religious doctrines and making them dependent on their sessions by only providing temporary solutions (Ehara, 2003, 225-228).

Ehara's argument regarding the *reinōsha* may to a certain extent be true. The insistence of practitioners such as Ms Okubo's and Ms Minami (see chapter 6 in relation to nationalism) that their clients join the regular meetings of their semi-religious communities and, subsequently, invest money in their activities, has undoubtedly contributed to forming this "bad" image of the *reinōsha* (see section 2.1.). But beyond his skilful utilization of this image in order to separate himself from the criticisms bestowed upon this type of activity, Ehara strikes me as being wrong about the evaluation of spiritual-type therapies.

In fact, as journalist Fujita Shōichi has noted, one of the defining characteristics of the *reinōsha* is that the vast majority of clients stops visiting them once their issues have been solved (1990, 61). Fujita's observation is based on his large scale investigation of *reinōsha* in the 1980s, who were practising under various roles and formats, from new religious leaders and rural shamanistic practitioners to UFO cult members (1992). My fieldwork among more traditional types of therapists such as Ms Natto, an *ogamiya* with

40 years experience, and Mr Kogura, the Shinto shrine priest who also acts as *reinōsha* in the small community of Takachiho (in northwest Miyazaki prefecture), confirmed the rather simpler format of their sessions. ‘The other day Ms X came to seek advice on how to boost her small shop’s business and I told her that she could, for example, group ingredients to make Japanese curry and display them in packages instead of selling them separately’ Ms Natto told me the second time I visited her. ‘I just throw ideas at my visitors and let them think for themselves; there is no better solution than the one you find on your own’, insisted Ms Natto.

Anne Bouchy, an anthropologist of religion who undertook extensive research on the city-dwelling *reinōsha* of the Osaka region in the 1980s, also notes how one of her main subjects of study, Ms Shigeno, attended to the most intimate, everyday needs of people, focusing on how to solve the here and now and using the simplest of techniques, the oracle (2005, 196). No complex imagery, no pressure to self-reflexivity, no opinions on the fate or life plans of the clients. Indeed it is the introduction of this sophisticated psychologizing ideology that makes spiritual-type therapies more addictive (thus the high percentage of repeaters) than their traditional predecessors. I shall here discuss the reason behind this argument which also lies behind the process of transition from one-time, calamity-inflicted client to spiritual-*gokko* (see end of chapter 4).

As we shall see in more detail in chapter 7, the reasons for consulting the spiritual therapists for the first time have not changed much from previous generations. As Joy Hendry has observed, traditional practitioners are consulted at times of change: ‘marriage, house-building and illness are all occasions when the usual order of things is threatened’ (2003, 135). And in contemporary urban lifestyles, the number of occasions when the order of things is unbalanced has undoubtedly increased. The pragmatic

physiomorphism of trouble causation is expressed in Japanese culture, as already mentioned, by placing the responsibility on outside physical or non-physical agents. A case of school-refusal<sup>103</sup> due to possession by a *tanuki*<sup>104</sup> (reported by Ms Natto) or the case of insomnia related to the unattended grave of ancestors (reported by Ms Minami) can be cited here as examples. Using Ohnuki-Tierney's well known interpretation, Japanese tend to place these "dirty" causal elements outside (*soto*) of the individual in order to keep the inside (*uchi*) clean at all times (1984, 73). The psychologism brought in by Ehara, however, with his insistence on the clients' need to self-grow (*jiko seichō*), because issues and their solutions are ultimately placed within the self, transfers the *soto* to the *uchi*, and in so doing soils the clean.

This CAM-ization of the *reinōsha* has two major consequences. Firstly, since everything is related to everything else, one worry (my professional career for example) is linked to the entire life of the individual (my personality, my health, my relationships) and ultimately to a re-evaluation of the decision-making process that the individual had followed up to that point. This phenomenon triggers the interpretation that all day-to-day needs, whose fulfilment was once considered most urgent, can be solved at once if one comes to know oneself and eventually change oneself. Questions addressed to the spiritual therapists have turned therefore to 'who am I?', 'who was I in the past life?', 'what should I do with my life from now on?' Instead of self-inflicted, as spiritual therapists like to think (see Ms Saeda's comment in section 3.3), the dependence of clients may, in fact, have been inflicted on the clients by the practitioners themselves.

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<sup>103</sup> School refusal in Japan (*tōkō kyōhi* or *futōkō*) is often considered as a syndrome needing medical care (Inoue et al., 2008) despite early warnings by medical anthropologists against the medicalisation of such social issues (Lock, 1986).

<sup>104</sup> Japanese raccoon dog.

Secondly, the soiling of the *uchi* places the individual in a liminal condition, which, as I have argued in the introduction, was created by the reinterpretation of the concept of health. The constant striving to keep the inside clean also finds meaning in the globalising culture of fitness that forces the individual to seek more and more ways to become healthier. Besides their moral statements (whose value will be discussed in the next two chapters), the spiritual therapists, particularly of the spiritual-type, by placing the responsibility on the client, limit themselves to the role of interpreter who can only survive if (s)he keeps finding new methods to say the same thing: “the answer is in yourself”; hence, the incredible proliferation of spiritual-type therapies seeking innovative ways to “read” the client. Before I discuss the next category of spiritual techniques, I shall demonstrate, through an example, the length to which spiritual counsellors go in “reading” their clients.

Ms Hamazaki offers among her five sessions a particularly original reading technique. During a session, which usually lasts one hour, Ms Hamazaki reads the energy of the client and depicts it in the form of the drawing of a flower. The stigma of the flower represents the spirit/Higher self of the person, and therefore if the petals are wide open, showing the stigma, the person is said to be close to his spirit and thinking a lot about his or her actions. If the opposite is the case (the petals are closed on the stigma of the flower) the client is required to reconsider their views on the world. Table 5.3 lists some of the symbolic interpretations that Ms Hamazaki uses in her rose-reading session, which was reported to be very popular.

Table 5.3 Symbolism in Ms Hamazaki's rose reading session

Colour of petals	Colour of the aura of the person
An insect flying around	Existence of a secret lover
Straight stalk	Life has been easy
Leaves on stalk	Represent the children of the client or dreams of the client
Thin stalk	Weak health
Stalk does not touch the earth	The client was an extraterrestrial in a previous life

#### **5.4. Energy-type therapies: DNA activation and the like**

The energy-type therapies and especially those that do not involve any massage-type manipulation remain the most difficult to report upon and evaluate. The reason is that they each often rely on very complex cosmologies which, if not fully understood and shared by the patient, lose their meaning and consequently contribute to the annulment of any effect that this type of therapy could have had. Consider, for example, the following sessions to which I submitted myself during the annual showcasing event of the Rocky Mountain Mystery School (RMMS), called 'Sacred Planet'.

My first choice was RMMS's most popular healing technique: DNA activation. According to Gudni Gudnason, the head of the school, DNA activation is supposed to awaken 22 of the 24 strands of our DNA and by, that process, make us happier, healthier and nearly fully aware of our hidden capabilities (*Star People for Ascension*, 2010, 22-24). Indeed, contrary to common scientific knowledge that the main component of our chromosomes, the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is made up of two

strands of nucleotides interwoven in the shape of a helix, in New Age circles, it is believed that there exist ten other hidden strands, which, added to the 12 strands of the DNA of our spiritual body, compose the source of our existence. As I sat down, therefore, on a chair along the wall visible on the right of figure 4.1, a woman in her mid-30s, dressed in what seemed like a belly-dancer's attire, handed me two stones and asked me to place my hands holding the stones on my knees. She then passed her fingers through my hair and lifted her arms above my head, making large gestures as if she were chasing away invisible flies. Next I was told to imagine a stone box in front of me in which I was to place my head, thus leaning forward. The healer then placed her left hand on my left shoulder and with the fingers of her right hand she first touched the centre of my neck and, for the next 10 minutes, she moved her right hand up and down along my spine as if she were fastening and unfastening it. At the end I was sprayed with a perfume and allowed to leave.

My other two choices were dictated by the fact that these were therapies offered by spiritual therapists whom I had previously interviewed. First, Mr Kenji, dressed in a black suit and a black shirt, was offering a session called 'vampire healing'. Sitting again on a chair, in a relaxed position, I closed my eyes while Mr Kenji put his hands on my shoulders and called three times on the "vampire lineage" (*kyūketsuki no keitō*) to make me happy and healthy. Then we remained in that position, silent, for 10 minutes before I was informed that the session was over. Finally, as I approached the completion of the event, I was grabbed by the arm by Mr Hosokawa, one of the head teachers of RMMS whom I had met at his house with his wife, also a spiritual therapist. It was strongly suggested to me that I try Ms Hosokawa's limited offer of the 'rose special healing' session which used a very expensive rose aroma-based perfume (hence the



price of the session was set at ¥5,000, instead of the ¥3,000 each of the other therapies cost me). This time the spraying of perfume preceded the séance and Ms Hosokawa, turning around my seat, keeping an approximate distance of one metre, seemed to manipulate invisible threads as if they were interwoven and she was loosening them. Fifteen minutes later, I was told that my *chakras* had been awakened and healed, and that I should return home to sleep.

Undoubtedly imagery plays the most significant role in this category of spiritual therapies. As I described above, there is hardly any physically observable information or manipulation on the part of the healer, and the level of communication is kept as minimal as possible. For the non-initiate, statements such as ‘I healed you’ which end these sessions sound empty, and beyond the relaxed state achieved from sitting in the same comfortable position for an extended period of time, clients like me do not effectively gain anything from these therapies. The effects of imagery in healing, however, have long been defended, particularly by researchers of shamanism, who consider that the effectiveness of shamanistic rituals lies in their use of the clients’ capacity to imagine (Peters and Price-Williams, 1980, 405). As Michael Taussig writes,

[T]he power of shamanism lies not with the shaman but with the differences created by the coming together of shaman and patient, differences constituting imagery essential to the articulation of what I call implicit social knowledge. Ground in this interplay of Otherness such knowledge brings being and imagining together in a medley of swirling discourses: the shaman’s song, the patient’s narratives, the bawdiness, the leaden silences, the purging (1987, 460).

Taussig’s description, namely the bawdiness, the silence, the perfume, does not seem to differ much from a DNA activation session. Some neo-shamanistic authors believe in fact that ‘images can communicate with tissues and organs, even cells to

effect a change' (Achterberg, 1987, 104) while properly performed imagery was argued even to have positive effects on our immune system (Achterberg, 1985, 10). It is however to Carl G. Jung's psychotherapeutic theories that shamanistic imagery has been most famously linked and this has particular significance for Japan, not only because many of the spiritual therapists who were interviewed claimed to be inspired by Jung's theories, but also because medical psychotherapy in Japan has mainly been established by Jungians.

In his analysis of neurotic patients, Jung saw individuals who had failed adequately to adapt to their environment and who had, as a result, activated - and then regressed into - an unconscious fantasy composed of what he called 'archetypal images' resembling in their forms mythological themes which he believed to be shared by all humans. Just as fever, therefore, is the underlying sign of a healing process, Jung considered this regression to fantasy as holding the synthetic forces which the psychotherapist is to use in order to bring positive change to the patient (Jackson, 1960, 1521-1522). Medical anthropologist, Kitanaka Junko, in her historical review of psychotherapy in Japan, notes that Jungian techniques such as sand play therapy have become widely successful forms of treatment in clinical settings because, as therapists often comment, Japanese are hesitant to verbalize and articulate their feelings in therapeutic encounters, thus such imagery-using sessions allow 'a kind of protective free space whereby therapeutic growth is obtained, not so much through verbal "confrontation" but through playful self-discovery' (2003, 242).

These last arguments certainly form the theoretical basis of the function of such energy-type spiritual therapies as DNA activation. Whether depicting real phenomena or not, the manipulation of the images is aimed at, and believed to be influencing, the

mental and physical health of the patient. The attribution of causality to such external factors as “inactivated DNA”, “sleeping *chakras*” or “low energy levels” confirms the transfer of phsyiomorphism inside the individual, as I have argued in the previous section, and the imagery-element further explains the popularity of such practices in Japan. The high input required by both the healer and the client in the energy-type of spiritual therapies seems, however, to point to yet another essential feature of these techniques. To illustrate this last argument, I provide, hereafter, the transcription of after-impressions from three clients treated with DNA activation by Mr Ushimoto (from Mr Ushimoto’s website).

Ms H. (in her 20s): ‘After our session, I felt as if a load was leaving my shoulders and I finally started thinking positively.’

Mr Ushimoto: ‘I really felt your shoulders and neck to be stiff. The heaviness you sense and your negative thoughts are probably due to the low energy that your stressful environment and people you meet every day pass on to you.’

Ms N (in her 20s): ‘At first I was really stressed, but when we started talking I realized that you must be a serious person and I was relieved (...) I usually never listen to the advice of people around me (it’s like I don’t hear them), but, surprisingly, I accepted all your recommendations and nice words.’

Mr Ushimoto: ‘Through DNA activation, I recharged your central core (in *katakana* in the original text), eliminated the negative ethereal (*etēru*) crystals that were stuck to your body and programmed a recharging of your mind and body.’

Ms M (in her 30s): ‘I really think it was a good decision to take that session (...) things have already started changing: I announced my resignation at my present

workplace and have already passed the first interview for my next job. I feel excited every day and make efforts to be my best.’

Mr Ushimoto: ‘You have a lot of spiritual power. The energy level of your crown *chakra* is immense! The session helped release these hidden capabilities and should give you courage to follow the path that will lead to your “light”.’

From the above comments, it becomes clear, not only that the key to these energy-type therapies lies in the space for imagination they leave, but also that the input from both the client and the healer in interpreting the session has extreme significance for the outcome. It is, I believe, this lack of input from the client that led the spiritual therapists to conclude that ‘(s)he does not want to heal’ when I asked them for their opinion about dissatisfied clientele. In fact, practitioners of Therapeutic Touch (TT), a non-contact, hands-on healing technique which is particularly popular among nurses in the USA and the UK, claim that it is the interrelatedness, the physical and imaginary coming together of the healer and the patient that is responsible for the effects of the technique, effects which otherwise have been usually attributed to a placebo response (Wright and Sayre-Adams, 2001, 172-173). TT has never scientifically been proven to help in the variety of conditions such as depression, nausea, fever and fractures that it claims it can treat (O’Mathúna et al., 2003, 168-169). Yet the reason I discuss it here is because of the great similarity<sup>105</sup> in both its claims and technique with “reconnective healing”, which I noted to be popular in Japan (see section 4.3). Both therapies are based on the theory that an exchange of energy between practitioner and patient re-balances the energy field of the patient, thus fixing all his or her issues. In the next chapter, I will discuss the ideology behind these theories, but here there remains one

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<sup>105</sup> Despite the claim of Eric Pearl that the two techniques are completely different (2001, 150).

question. How can people, in my case Japanese people who have never met each other succeed in the span of one hour to, at least temporarily, construct a relationship that affects the life of one (if not also of the other) in a reportedly significant way?

The websites, blogs and newsletters of the spiritual therapists I interviewed are full of these after-impression reports (*taikendan*) that clearly aim at adding to the legitimacy of the practitioner. Ms Isomura is a reconnection healer who publishes a newsletter online, every fortnight. On the 14 April 2010, the first topic of the newsletter was the case of a female patient who during her counselling session (10 minutes) followed by reconnection healing (35 minutes) remembered that her grand-father had treated her badly in her childhood. She believed that this memory and the subsequent healing contributed to ending her constipation and high blood pressure problems. Beyond, of course, the possibility that medicine which this woman might have taken during the same period might be responsible for the improvement of her condition, and that, as previously discussed, the imagery and close contact with a person might have added to a feeling of relief, there is still the question of how this type of encounter was possible.

Chikako Ozawa-de Silva in her study of the alarming rise of internet suicide pacts in Japan, concludes that the connection with a stranger through the internet may act as a tool to create a form of quasi-community devoid of the three components playing a crucial role in forming Japanese identity, namely social embeddedness, obligations and conformity (2008, 537). With regard to this perspective, I argue therefore that in Japanese society, the significant role played by social relations in defining “who you are” lies at the heart not only of the reason why short-term meetings with strangers requiring no social obligations allow such “therapeutic” results, but also

why the objects of physiomorphism in spiritual therapy settings of Japanese illness causation are the social relations in a past life, childhood or the present, as demonstrated, for example, in the previously mentioned testimonies.

### **5.5. Conclusion: no effects without narratives**

In this chapter I have argued, using examples from the most popular spiritual therapies, that despite their marginality within the Japanese concept of CAM, these techniques share the fundamental beliefs about the human body upon which complementary and alternative medicines around the world are based. I have also shown that their popularity may be linked to the Japanese physiomorphic illness aetiology which has survived the psychologism of the therapy culture and that originated from the transformation of the concept of health. Yet, the transfer of physiomorphism to the inside (*uchi*) of the individual has, I have claimed, contributed to both the endless striving of the Japanese clients to “know themselves” and the constant efforts of the spiritual therapists (contrary to their predecessors, the *reinōsha*) to find new methods of making their skill indispensable. Finally, in addition to the real therapeutic effects that the imagery produced during these sessions may have on the Japanese people, who are otherwise resilient to verbal confrontation, I conclude that the lack of social obligations towards the stranger-therapist may bear particular significance for the attribution of issue causality and for the effectiveness of these therapies on the Japanese (where identity formation is generally argued to stem from social relations).

There is, however, no doubt that the unwillingness of the practitioners to take responsibility for the negative or ineffective results of their techniques, and the freedom, thanks to this type of therapy, to reinterpret the sessions to their own advantage may justifiably lead one to criticise and even attempt to ban such practices. Recalling the

discussion in the previous chapter, the therapists may refer to there being a choice for the clients to refuse to pay for sessions about which they were dissatisfied, but the argument cannot be that simple. Beyond the oversimplified cause-effect connections that are, often forcibly, “discovered” in the narrative of the clients, leading them to decisions they would never have taken otherwise (see chapter 6), some of these therapies are just plainly dangerous. DNA activation, for example, requires the ingestion of some drops of antimony (as mentioned in section 4.3) which comes in a white, unlabelled bottle given to the client at the end of the session. According to the website [medicinenet.com](http://www.medicinenet.com), antimony is a ‘silvery-white earth metal which at high levels can be toxic (...) Ingesting large doses of antimony can also cause vomiting’<sup>106</sup>. Mr Hosokawa, who, in the salon he owns with his wife, delivers almost every one of the RMMS sessions, admitted during our interview on 27 April 2009 that some of his DNA activation clients complain that they become feverish, have diarrhoea and vomit after drinking antimony. However, Mr Hosokawa’s response was always the same: ‘this is because your body rejects the soiled elements; you will feel better when you finish drinking’.

Among the dozens of spiritual therapies there are bound to be other harmful techniques (I have come across at least two others) whose popularity, if not already low, will hopefully decrease due to the word of mouth information exchange that characterises the spiritual community. By contrast, if one was to indicate the least harmful or life-changing therapy among the most popular ones that exist today, that

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<sup>106</sup> <http://www.medterMsc.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=18819> visited on 14 May 2010.

would be *reiki* which, despite its amazing variety of forms<sup>107</sup>, remains one of the simplest applications of lower mesmerism, hence its widespread use. *Reiki* is a hands-on technique ‘based on accessing the universal life energy, which is believed by *reiki* adherents to be part of everyone and everything’ (Charlish and Robertshaw, 2006, 8). Many *reiki* healers do of course claim to fix various serious diseases and that is why licenses to become a *reiki* master are highly priced (see section 4.1.). In Japan, its popularity is also related to the fact that the technique was discovered by a Japanese-Hawaian woman and imported back to the country in the 1980s. Although I neither condone its therapeutic claims nor would I ever probably seek *reiki* healing for personal health problems, I have to admit that my experience of it remains a pleasant memory of my fieldwork.

Ms Reiko was one of the first spiritual therapists I set out to interview. She is also, retrospectively, one of the very few really cooperative informants who seemed to have completely opened her thoughts during our discussion. The stress I had felt before I meet Ms Reiko soon, therefore, transformed into relief when I realized how willing she was to answer my questions; yet after three hours and a half of constant note-taking I was exhausted and ready to leave. Ms Reiko then suggested that I try out her *reiki* healing session, and curiosity added to politeness prevented me from refusing the offer. For the next hour I sat on a chair in the middle of the room and Ms Reiko placed her hands on my body<sup>108</sup> while making casual conversation about her daily life, her experience of foreign countries and so on. Despite the awkwardness of the situation, I

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<sup>107</sup> Olav Hammer considers Reiki healing to be the “oriental” element most obviously part of a New Age world-view, hence the multitude of healing systems that claim to be derived from it (2004, 139-140).

<sup>108</sup> Reiki practitioners use specific hand positions that correspond to the physical body, its organs and the seven *chakras* (Charlish and Robertshaw, 2006, 90-141).



still remember to this day the immense sense of relief stemming from the soothing atmosphere Ms Reiko managed to build during that hour. Later, I realized that at the end of my interviews I was often ready to share (even if I eventually never did) my most secret worries with the therapists who had been especially expressive in their answers. I do not attribute this to the existence of any “energy” or supernatural power, but simply to the combination of happiness for having finished a difficult task with the “good-listener” ability of many of these practitioners.

I conclude therefore my evaluation of the practice of spiritual therapy by proposing that without the narratives - the descriptions of the past lives, the advice of the guardian spirits, the interpretations of energy work and all the clients’ stories - based on particular concepts and ideas (discussed in chapter 6), spiritual therapy consists merely of a warm, relaxing and non-binding encounter with a person paid to listen and repeat to the client the moral values of a post-modern, in this case, Japanese society (see chapter 7 for further discussion). Narration however, as Laurence J. Kirmayer notes,

[M]ay heal by allowing symbolic closure, bringing a sense of completeness or coherent emplotment to the fragmented and chaotic elements of illness experience. It may transform the meaning of experience by conferring metaphorical qualities or blending representational spaces. It may build solidarity with others through shared accounts of suffering in socially understandable and valorized terms. Finally, narration may open up new possibilities, subjunctivizing predicaments viewed as fixed and unchangeable (2006, 595).

In the following chapter I propose to examine, not only how these narratives are built and what they entail, but also how they are rendered meaningful for the Japanese clients.

## **Chapter 6: Fundamentals of the Ideology of Spiritual Therapies**

In the previous chapter, the evaluation of the practice of spiritual therapy was based on my participant observations and I examined the fundamental beliefs on which this therapy's functional role is presumed to be based and how these assumptions may appeal to Japanese illness aetiology and preferred therapeutic processes. In order to reproduce faithfully the bodily experience of spiritual therapy, I specifically ignored in that analysis the significant part played by the narratives: the cosmology which is used by the spiritual therapists to give meaning to these sessions and which contains the characteristic elements of belief already identified by researchers studying the New Age/alternative spirituality movement (see section 1.1). Considering the breadth of spiritual therapies, it would be practically impossible to analyse in this chapter the use of cosmological concepts for every technique, and it would also be meaningless to refer to the contents of the corresponding spiritual therapy manuals favoured by the therapists, contents that they seemed hardly to remember (see section 3.1).

The objective of this chapter, therefore, does not lie in demonstrating similarities between the rationale of Japanese spiritual therapists to that of their Western counterparts (an observation that does not really need verification considering that they have access to the same pool of concepts), but rather to shed light on how my informants combine the cosmological narratives of the new spirituality culture with Japanese cultural elements in order to appeal to their Japanese clients. Rather than the mere application of specific therapeutic techniques, the analysis of this combination of concepts is expected to reveal ideological trends characterizing the entire therapeutic process of Japanese spiritual therapy and, in order to do this, I will use the theoretical

framework developed by Thomas J. Csordas to explain the therapeutic process in comparative studies.

Csordas's theory is chosen here not only because of the appropriateness of his phenomenological approach, which has been the prominent methodology in studies of shamanism in Japan and elsewhere (Carmen Blacker is the obvious example), but especially because of the commonalities between his object of interest and mine. Csordas's research was undertaken over a three-year period during which he succeeded in collecting data from a large population of members (587) and healers (87) of the contemporary North American religious movement called Catholic Charismatic Renewal (1994, viii). Having appeared in the late 1960s, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal has been found to share many elements with the New Age Movement, such as the attempt to rediscover invisible realms of sacred power or the phenomenon termed "speaking in tongues" which parallels the practice of channelling (Lucas, 1992, 194, 197). Perhaps because of this parallelism Csordas reaches a conclusion that I believe to be equally significant in the case of spiritual therapy. He argues that 'anthropological analyses should not be aimed at identifying definitive therapeutic outcomes, but at specifying the incremental efficacy of the therapeutic process' (1994, 72)- in other words, he seeks to consider the ritual process of healing as only the initiator of "partial" and "everyday" healings that ultimately sustain the ritual system. In this respect, Csordas proposes that such an analysis requires an interpretive approach of the four elements of the therapeutic process, which he describes as follows.

Table 6.1 The four elements of the therapeutic process  
(compiled from Csordas, 1988, 132-135; 1994, 72-73)

disposition	Looking not only at psychological states, such as expectancy or “faith to be healed”, but at the disposition of persons within the healing process vis-à-vis social networks and symbolic resources.
experience of the sacred	Taking into account not only the religious formulation of the human condition in relation to the divine ( <i>spiritual</i> in our case) and the repertoire of ritual elements that constitute legitimate manifestations of divine ( <i>spiritual</i> ) power, but also variations in individual capacities for experience of the sacred.
elaboration of alternatives	Different healing systems may conceive the alternatives as new pathways, as a means of becoming unstuck, or of overcoming obstacles, as a way out of trouble, or in terms of a variety of other metaphors. They may use ritual or pragmatic means and may encourage activity or passivity, but the possibilities must be perceived as real and realistic.
actualization of change	What counts as change, as well as the degree to which that change is seen as significant by participants, cannot be taken for granted. Our concern is to define minimal elements of efficacy.

Contrary to Csordas, however, I only have in my possession the interview records of 68 spiritual therapists and very fragmented information on a few of their clients. When applying Csordas’s model, I will therefore take the perspective of the practitioners and strive to highlight the major narrative trends that, in the Japanese setting, are representative of the four elements described above.

The first section of this chapter will consider the disposition of spiritual therapists in their use of the “legacy” of spiritual therapy in Japan. Apart from those who for example clearly stated their particular heritage as a family of *reinōsha* (see section 3.1), my informants often tended to compare themselves with what they

considered “older” types of practitioners such as the *ogamiya* or to present themselves as these “older” types of therapists when they deemed that the client was not ready to accept their innovative approaches. Here, my interviews with more “traditional” forms of practice in Miyazaki and Okinawa prefecture have proved useful in attempting to locate the spiritual therapists on a linear evolutionary axis that represents their cosmological conception of their position in relation to the multitude of other forms of spiritual practice today.

In the second section, I will turn to the opinions expressed by my informants regarding the nature of “the spiritual” and what they believe to comprise manifestations of “spiritual powers”. Ranging from a discussion of their epiphanic experiences (see section 3.1) to a conversation about whom they believe is more or less likely to gain from their sessions, the ideology expressed by my informants will again be represented as a line joining two extremes: ‘a Weberian spectrum, from the world-rejecting to the world-affirming’ (Heelas, 1996, 30). This will lead me to discuss in the third section of this chapter the range of cosmological reasons employed by the spiritual therapists to explain their clients’ issues and the alternatives which they propose in order to solve those issues. Particular emphasis will be placed on the existence of a nationalistic ideology that was said to distinguish Japanese (and, according to sources, Korean<sup>109</sup>) new spirituality culture from its Western counterpart (see section 1.3). At the other extreme of this scale of alternatives I will locate the fascination with everything Western stemming from the increasing popularity of foreign “spiritual teachers” and “spiritual academies”, without of course ignoring the paradoxical arguments, such as

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<sup>109</sup> See Woo (2008).

that of Ms Saeda (see section 3.3), which hint at a situational use of these extreme precepts.

The final section will comprise an elaboration of the scope of efficacy as conceptualized by the spiritual therapists, focussing on the minimal effects induced by the moral statements mentioned in Chapter 5. The axis built out of this fourth element of the therapeutic process will be based on the theoretical propositions of Azuma Hiroki (2009 [2001]) and will extend from the adherents to a grande narrative of “spirituality” to those whom Mr Takahashi called spiritual-*gokko* (see conclusion of Chapter 4) and who resemble Azuma’s “database animals”. Adding this last axis to the three developed in the rest of the chapter, the conclusion will present a composite-continuum between a “conservative” and a “liberal” form of spiritual therapy, thus providing the full picture of the ideology behind the therapeutic process in the contemporary Japanese practice of spiritual therapy and leading, in Chapter 7, to a discussion of the sociological factors accounting for the positions of different spiritual therapists on that continuum.

### **6.1. Disposition: the legacy of spiritual therapy**

My last question in the interviews with spiritual therapists frequently revealed the therapists’ critical stance towards Ehara Hiroyuki (see end of section 3.3) who was at times seen as being too much driven by financial profit (hence, not sufficiently “spiritual”) or was simply considered as yet another powerless, “lower ranking” practitioner. In this last instance, the discussion often veered into an explanation of the hierarchy of spiritual therapists and their skills, a scale whose summit was usually held by the speaker him or herself. For example, Ms Chizuko and Ms Momoyama, the two sisters who later organised the debate mentioned in section 2.3, believed that traditional magico-religious practitioners such as the *itako* occupy a lower level of the hierarchy

and use the two “simple” techniques of exorcism and communication with the spirits of the dead. On the middle level of this hierarchy, the sisters placed Ehara Hiroyuki who demonstrated a spiritual awakening on the individual level that allowed him to see the aura of people in addition to practising traditional shamanistic techniques. Finally, having awakened to a “spiritual world” (*supirichuaru sekai*), the two sisters had joined at the top of the hierarchy the spiritual therapists who were gifted with a completely different vision of the cosmos and were in possession of the power to heal.

Ms Fumada provided a similar image of this hierarchy, this time placing Ehara at the top of a smaller scale encompassing all *reinōsha*. This scale ranged from the regular folk who are unable to see or hear the dead to the shamanistic practitioners who can communicate with the spirits, and then to Ehara Hiroyuki, who as a spiritual counsellor is able to guide his clients using the same spiritual powers. Ms Fumada claimed that she was a “spiritual teacher”, someone who acts above the level of the *reinōsha*, and who, like the sisters previously mentioned, has gained full knowledge of the workings of the universe and of the methods to fix every one of her clients’ issues. It becomes clear from these accounts that, as noted in section 2.1, the term *reinōsha* not only refers to the popular category of old (*itako*) and new (spiritual counsellor) versions of practitioners who specialize in some type of communication with the dead, but also that it has become obsolete, a remnant of the past when spiritual therapists had limited awareness and thus limited powers.

It is also worth noting that fortune-tellers in their different forms, from hand-readers to *feng-shui* masters, because they rely on a series of often numerical constants, are categorized with the majority of “regular” human beings, and referred to as practitioners of statistical studies (*tōkei gaku*). For Ms Suzuki, for example, the

fortune-tellers' ability merely consists of helping people to feel part of a group that is believed to share the same set of life patterns. A question remains: what has provoked this sudden change of focus or, as it was interpreted by the spiritual therapists themselves, the opening of new levels of awakening? I believe the answer to this question lies partly in the radical changes in the Japanese perception of the concept of "spirits" by the recent, Western influx of New Age ideas. Hereafter I explain the reasons behind this shift.

Komatsu Kazuhiro, a Japanese authority on spirit possession, borrows Yoneyama Toshinao's argument that Japanese culture was shaped by the 'small basin universe' (*kobonchi uchū*), which corresponds to the characteristic landscape of the country, and suggests that this enclosed living environment gave birth to the basic and commonly shared Japanese belief that spirits dwell in everything: from the trees to the buildings and of course inside humans themselves (Komatsu, 1994, 53). Subsequently, relations with these spirits, which were thought to feel and behave as humans, could be nurtured or broken and in the second instance, calamities, such as famine and disease, could ensue and take the form of spectres (*yōkai*). In order to battle these spectres which could be of animal form (fox, *tanuki*), man-made (house-haunting spirits) or of human origin (spirits of the dead or of the living [*ikiriyō*]), the Japanese appealed to the various magico-religious practitioners who have appeared over the centuries and who could be generally conceptualized in terms of the two types identified by Carmen Blacker: the spirit vessel-medium (*miko*) and the spirit exorcising ascetic (Narby and Huxley, 2001, 208). However, due to their powers, these figures always occupy the position of a stranger (*ijin*) (Komatsu, 1994, 251) who, as in other cultures around the world, represents the 'mystical "other" world' (Yoshida, 1981, 96); hence the continuing



attractiveness felt by the clients towards the secrecy and marginality of the spiritual therapists (see section 5.3).

The modernization of Japan from the nineteenth century onwards brought about two major changes in magico-religious practice. Firstly, urbanization opened up the “basin” and provoked an individualization of cosmologies: today one may believe in the existence of UFOs but not in spirit possession (Komatsu, 1994, 160). And secondly, as natural spaces of darkness retreated, human-centred spectres remained the only ones to scare the Japanese people (ibid, 152). Spiritualism (the belief in and practice of communication with spirits) then, as a ‘product of modernity’ (Gebhardt, 2004, 385) invaded a rationalism-driven Japanese society which had started persecuting its traditional spiritual therapists (Ikegami, 1994 ; Hardacre, 1994), but which was also looking for a solution to the new issue of individual salvation (Uchida and Shaku, 2010, 114). One of the solutions developed was Shintō spiritualism (*Shintō reigaku*) which sought individual salvation in the blend of Western and Japanese practices of communication with the spirits of the dead (human-centred spectres) and in occult practices popular at the turn of the century such as hypnotism (*suiminjutsu*) and laying-on-of-hands (*tekazashi*, an early form of TT and other hands-on healing techniques [mentioned in section 5.4]). Deguchi Onisaburo, the co-founder of the Oomoto religious group in 1892, was a fervent researcher of Shinto spiritualism and the influence of his ideas reverberated through later religious groups such as Seichō no Ie (1930) down to the last wave of new religions that appeared in the 1970s<sup>110</sup> such as Sūkyō Mahikari (1978) (Uchida and Shaku, 2010, 116-117).

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<sup>110</sup> According to the authors, these new-new religions (or post-new religions) which focused especially on healing have been the most influenced (directly or indirectly) by Deguchi’s spiritualism. Other

A major proof of this influence lies in the revival instigated by Oomoto of *chinkon kishin*, a technique which is practised by many new religions in different formats and which is a mediated spirit possession consisting of one person who induces spirit possession in another, then conducts a dialogue with the spirit before sending it back to “the other world” (Staemmler, 2002, 30). In form, this technique does not differ much from the *yorigitō* rituals combining medium and ascetic which have been practised in Japan from the ninth century (Blacker, 1999, 252), or from the *ogamiya* who today frequently trust their family members or close associates to interpret the wishes of the spirits. Ms Natto, the *ogamiya* living in the outskirts of Nobeoka-city, in a small basin universe surrounded by two mountains and a river, often had to confirm with her sister the words of *Ryūjin*, the Dragon God to whom she believes she is married and who tends to dictate the solutions for Ms Natto’s clients’ problems through her. Whether a god, an ancestor or a *tanuki* (see section 5.3), Ms Natto never trusted the spirits because their appearance meant human calamity, reflecting Komatsu’s argument that spectres in Japan are, and have always been, symbols of fear<sup>111</sup>.

The same can be said for the older spiritual therapists in my sample who often crossed paths with the new-new religions. While Ms Okubo, for example, confesses in her published autobiography that she started hearing the voices of spirits just after a three-year period (1987-1990) of intense participation in meetings of various religious organisations, Mr Matsuyama claimed that his spiritual powers became stronger when, on his mother’s insistence, he joined Sūkyō Mahikari. According to him, his

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examples cited are God Light Association (1970), Shinjishūmeikai (1970), Agonshū (1978), Kōfuku no Kagaku (1986), Aum Shinrikyō (1989).

<sup>111</sup> Komatsu, in fact, argues that there is no significant distinction between *yōkai* (spectre) and *kami* (god) in Japanese culture. The two can be considered as the two sides of a coin, one community’s spectre may simultaneously be another community’s god (1994, 49-51).

possessions during *o-kiyome* (this religious group's version of *chinkon kishin*) were so powerful that he was, in fact, expelled from the group on suspicion of trying to overpower the founder. Later, in his individual sessions, he tended to be possessed by the guardian spirit of the client who would then talk through his mouth to his or her protégé and suggest the reasons for his or her problems. After the session, Mr Matsuyama claimed that he was unable to remember what he had said, but in the last ten years he had noticed a change. He believed that he had become one with his own guardian spirit and thus did not need to be possessed in order to have access to the information of the world of the spirits; he could do so directly and consciously.

The change in Mr Matsuyama's methodology can be interpreted as a turning point in the Japanese attitude towards spirits. What can be called the first stage of individualisation in spiritual therapies corresponds to Komatsu's observation that since the Meiji period, particularly in urban areas, there has been a progressive focus on calamities attributed to only human-centred spectres for which various techniques were developed and popularized in the twentieth century mainly by Oomoto-inspired new religious groups. With the influence of the New Age Movement from the West, I argue that a second level of individualization was triggered. This time the spectres ceased being fearful entities; instead, it was human amateur use of the spirits that led to calamities.

Spiritual therapists expressed this second level of individualization as a discovery of the good nature of the spirits. Ms Kayama, for example, used to be scared of her visions of what she believed to be spirits of the dead and which she frequently experienced until about four years ago. Her descriptions of dead babies flying across the room and trying to "eat" her young daughter were rather unsettling stories to listen to.

But, one day, while waiting at the salon of a *reiki* healer, she stumbled across a pack of Doreen Virtue's oracle cards picturing angel-like figures carrying positive messages such as 'you have an important life purpose'<sup>112</sup>. 'So, I realized that spirits may also be good and that I don't have to think about them only as evil', concluded Ms Kayama.

Ms Suzuki, hearing her father's constant reference to his scary visions of the dead, had similar experiences to Ms Kayama until the year of the Aum incident, which, as for a majority of spiritual therapists, incited her to forget about all these visions. Later in her life she watched Ehara Hiroyuki on television and realized that, not only can spirits be consoling, but also that her powers could be used for the greater good. Ehara's kind way of conducting sessions was always contrasted by my informants with earlier *reinōsha* and fortune-tellers in the media, such as Hosoki Kazuko, who tended to use the spirits to frighten and sometimes threaten their guests (recall here Ehara's comparison of his craft with that of his predecessors in section 5.3). Ms Sakura, for example, who claimed to be descended from a family of *reinōsha* decided to follow her ancestors' path only after realizing that, like Ehara, the profession does not have to be scary.

Ehara's emphasis and use of the long-established Western spiritualist concept of guardian spirit (*shugorei*)<sup>113</sup>, as an individual protector who accompanies every human being (Ehara, 2007a, 29), may have contributed significantly to this shift of attitude towards spirits in Japan. And, as a result of this second level of individualization,

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<sup>112</sup> After checking on Doreen Virtue's website, this may be the card of Archangel Gabrielle (*sic*).

<sup>113</sup> Many of these Japanese translations of English spiritualist terms are attributed to Asano Wasaburō (1874-1937), founder of the Society for Scientific Research on Scientific Phenomena (*Shinrei Kagaku Kenkyūkai*) in 1922. For an in-depth discussion of Asano's contribution to spiritualism in early twentieth century Japan, see Hardacre (1998).

spiritual therapists who have started to believe in the good nature of spirits interpreted their new belief as an awakening that raises them above other magico-religious practitioners. If such a heightened awareness no longer stigmatizes spiritual therapists as “strangers” who deal with “soiled” entities, the meaning of possessing spiritual powers must have also changed. It is this transformation of the experience of the sacred by the spiritual therapists that I discuss in the next section.

## **6.2. The experience of the sacred: what is “the spiritual”?**

In his seminal analysis of the New Age, Paul Heelas explains that activities of the movement lie along a spectrum: at one end ‘the emphasis is very much on detachment. In contrast, at the other end (...) the emphasis is on empowerment and prosperity’ (1996, 30). Heelas then develops his idea by providing a sequence of keywords describing individuals from one end to the other of the spectrum: *spiritually “purist”, counter-cultural, self-actualization, harmonial, mainstream-transformation, self-enchancement* and finally, at the world-affirming end, *self- or mainstream-empowerer* (ibid, 30-32).

As with Heelas’s observations regarding New Agers, the majority of my informants can be located in the middle of the spectrum, in that they try to take the best of both the mainstream and the spiritual worlds. They can be described as “harmonial” in attempting to reach a self-spirituality by transforming the way they experience modern society and by seeking self-enhancement in the use of the intrinsic/hidden-to-the-common-eye/spiritual values that everyday life has to offer. However, contrary to Western new spirituality culture, there seem to be very few “spiritual purists” in Japan. In fact, only one (Mr Wakafune) of the 68 therapists interviewed seemed to have a lifestyle that corresponded to his world-rejecting views.

For the rest of those who sometimes took a critical stance against materialism, further questioning and observation of their practices always revealed the superficiality of their arguments; indeed, their fervent spiritualism seemed rather to consist of one of the beliefs to which the therapist is expected to adhere, an important element of his or her spiritual business-panoply. In this perspective, and recalling the analysis of the spiritual business in Chapter 4, Japanese spiritual therapists tend to spread over that end of Heelas's spectrum where all material means available are employed for self-promotion and self-empowerment.

Mr Wakafune was, from the beginning, a very special case. His website, which was closed down this year for unknown reasons, was simply a white page with a picture of a chair, the name of his salon that stood for 'save me' in Hindu and a short sentence saying that he was born in 1974 and that, after an initial interest in psychology, he had become a healer in 2007. This lack of information and self-promotion strongly contrasted with the lavish websites of the great majority of spiritual therapists and, as many users of spiritual therapy would certainly have done, I first hesitated to contact Mr Wakafune. His quick and positive answer to my message, however, slightly reassured me and convinced me to make the two-hour train journey east of Tokyo to meet him.

Mr Wakafune worked at the till of a gift shop next to the small train station building of a typical village lost in the Japanese countryside. As we sat down to have a coffee in the cafeteria above his work place, I noticed the suspicious looks of the regular clientele, which, to my surprise, were targeting not me, but him. In the next two hours, my interlocutor launched into an often loud voice, which was very unusual for a Japanese spiritual therapist talking in a public place, into a diatribe against the human race and especially his clients. 'People don't have issues. They just create them. My role

is to remove the bad energies, but I cannot change people's minds', repeated Mr Wakafune on several instances when he complained about the selfishness and short-sightedness of his patients. Seemingly unable to have a conversation (he himself confessed to disliking being in the company of people; he even went as far as calling himself *hikikomori*<sup>114</sup>), I eventually gave up trying to question Mr Wakafune and let him speak his mind. The interview revealed that he had been a follower and still is a fervent believer of Asahara Shōkō, the founder of Aum Shinrikyō, but that since Aum's dissolution, he had joined the ranks of Sri Kaleshwar, the Indian guru, one year older than Mr Wakafune, whose activities, such as the performance of "miracles" and the "magical" appearance of jewels from his empty hands are very similar to those of India's most famous spiritualist, Sathya Sai Baba. Both have been accused of financial (and in Sai Baba's case also sexual) abuses, not a surprise when considering the cost of a session with Kaleshwar (see section 4.3).

Mr Wakafune's belief in the meaninglessness of material life ('there is no reason to worry about anything') and his claims of healing cancer and pneumonia just by touching the forehead of his patients (on their "third eye") remain very rare among the spiritual therapists interviewed. But his case hints at an important conclusion: the fact that the position of spiritual therapists on Heelas's spectrum is significantly influenced by whether or not they emphasize epiphanic experiences as the trigger for their first or deeper commitment to spiritual therapy. In section 3.1, I indicated that we could arbitrarily make a distinction between those like Mr Wakafune who have been long-term fans of spiritual techniques (Mr Wakafune like many others started by taking

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<sup>114</sup> In using the word "*hikikomori*", Mr Wakafune identified himself with a vast range of people from loners to serious cases of social withdrawal.

fortune-telling lessons) and those who had some kind of epiphanic experience that suddenly “opened their eyes” to spirituality. Although the first category seems to be the more populated, I have argued that long term aficionados also employ epiphanic narratives, hence the arbitrariness of the division.

As anthropologist Michael F. Brown demonstrates in his study of 40 American practitioners of channelling, the pattern of ‘the power of the wounded healer’ is a central narrative of the life stories of people involved in alternative spirituality (1997, 57). The acquiring of supernatural powers during a sudden, out-of-this-world event following a particularly strenuous period in the life of the future therapist is a common type of story professed by traditional shamanistic practitioners around the world and popularized by nineteenth-century spiritualists such as Phineas Quimby, the founder of the New Thought Movement. I argue that in the Japanese case, whether this narrative is fabricated or not, the awakening to a spirituality that resulted from this experience seldom leads to a world-rejecting attitude because the Japanese practitioners remain deeply connected and frequently make use, in their sessions, of the empowerment which they believe they have gained from the re-evaluation of their everyday life.

For the few (5) long-term fans who did not refer to any epiphanic experience, such as Mr Wakafune, the world-rejecting attitude expressed itself mainly in the form of a feeling of superiority, of being the only one capable of seeing among the blind. There were neither signs of abandoning materialistic pleasures nor concrete behaviour that demonstrated the belief that life, as we know it, is an illusion. I have already mentioned Mr Ushimoto’s warning (see conclusion of Chapter 4) that not everyone can become a spiritual therapist and, like him, be able to connect to the higher force (which RMMS adepts call ‘Hierarchy of Life’) that activated his powers. Ms Satsuma, who believed



that she has always been special, made similar comments. She said, 'I always had what I wanted in life. I can look at a book and know its contents the same way I can guess a client's worries before (s)he speaks', when I asked her about what spiritual awakening meant for her. Ms Satsuma spent her entire young adult life travelling at least 10 times to India to see Sai Baba, but also participating in workshops and reading books on every known therapy, from homeopathy to aura-soma and hypnotherapy.

Considering that "being spiritual" is a gift one has acquired because one is special, is a belief that strongly contrasts with the view held by the majority of spiritual therapists who fall in the middle and the latter end of Heelas's spectrum, where "spirituality" is accessible now, to everyone and through everyday life. Ms Kikuko explained the difference to me as follows: 'People who come to me often think that spiritual means psychic, but in fact it means the way people can spend a happy life. People should not focus on their past life, but on the present, on their feelings of love and happiness'. This last comment sounded very surprising coming from someone who practices past-life reading (see section 4.2), but, as Brown also observes, these paradoxes disappear when one realizes that behind most alternative spirituality practices there is the desire to become 'aware of the hidden forces that stand in the way of creating a new and better personal reality' (ibid, 48). For the majority of my informants these hidden forces are to be found in their clients' "bad habits" that have brought them to the doorstep of their salon and which, as with the epiphanic experiences of the spiritual therapists themselves, comprise both a sign that they need to change and "negative energies" that may be due to a variety of factors (as demonstrated in Chapter 5), from past life deeds, to unforgiving spirits of the dead or even to self-fabricated energy blocks.

The key to “spirituality”, to “becoming aware”, to empowerment lies therefore in this world and is usually revealed through the first experience of spiritual therapy. Ms Motoyama started to invest her time in the promotion of spiritual therapy cards after she miraculously survived breast cancer, whereas Ms Shimura decided to learn hypnotherapy when her divorce made her realize that she had spent 20 years of her life in her husband’s shadow, just being proud of having achieved the dream of her childhood friends: being married to a rich foreigner. For Ms Motoya and Ms Nanase, their contact with spiritual therapy, *reiki* and fortune-telling respectively, represented the first time they felt that they had found something they were good at practising, having spent their twenties accumulating part-time and contract jobs while being looked down on by their families. For others such as Ms Yamada, Ms Fukuda and Ms Isomura, it was the death of a boyfriend which firstly led to short supernatural experiences (the vision of lightning in a clear sky, voices from the dead, disappearance of objects) and secondly to a re-evaluation of their life that translated into shifting from a full-time, busy job to a part-time occupation while learning spiritual therapy on the side. Of course I suspect that the mainstreaming of the new spirituality culture in Japan has limited the occurrence of “virgin” cases such as the last three in which the individual had not *a priori* been in contact with spiritual therapy before the triggering event.

Most important for the Japanese spiritual therapists, however, is that this new spirituality means that one strives to cultivate oneself to be a better, spiritual person who holds a holistic view of the universe and uses every means to improve his or her life; this bears many similarities with the traditional Japanese beliefs in *shūyō* (self-cultivation). Self-cultivation constitutes an essential element of Neo-Confucianism, a school of thought that has significantly influenced Japanese

culture and society since its proliferation in the discourse of the Tokugawa period's military government, which was concerned 'with the achievement and maintenance of a stable and harmonious society' (Nosco, 1997, 7). Mary Evelyn Tucker shows how major thinkers of that period, such as Yamazaki Ansai and Kaibara Ekken, managed to reach a syncretism between Confucianism and Shinto and Buddhist ideas through the use of the dialectic of cosmology and cultivation: self-cultivation as a means to harmonize the self with the changes of the universe was essentially a metaphor of the interpenetration of human beings and nature, self and society, individual and body politics through the flow of *chi*, the material force of the universe (Tucker, 1998, 15-17). Here we can see why the vitalism and holism of CAM therapies (see section 5.1) strongly appeal to Japanese practitioners. The continuation with today's spiritual practices becomes even more evident when we consider that the above syncretism led to the transformation of early ascetic, *miko* and divination magical rites into self-cultivation acts (Hardacre, 1994, 158; Hayashi, 1994) that inspired new social movements in the nineteenth century which came to be known as new religions.

In section 1.3, I have already hinted at the fact that self-cultivation is a common element between occultural and new religious themes. As Nagai Mikiko explains, this self-cultivation, defined as aiming 'for one's own improvement through reflecting on one's actions and one's mental, spiritual or emotional well-being' (1995, 302), composes the ethical element which, in combination with a magical element, can be found in the majority of new religions, such as Tenrikyō (founded in 1838), Konkōkyō (1859), Sekaikyūseikyō (1935) and Shinnyōen (1936) (Nagai, 1994). In fact, the mediated spirit possession (*chinkon kishin*) in all its practical formats, such as Sūkyō Mahikari's *okiyome* (founded in 1978) (from which Mr Matsuyama confessed to have

been strongly influenced) or Shinnyoen's *sesshin*, is based on the two concepts of *chinkon*, the purification of one's spirit, and *kishin*, the possession by a spirit; new religions tended to emphasize the first over the second (Broder, 2008, 340, 346). This practice itself, therefore, represents the intimate relation between the two elements, cultivation and magic, which were passed on to the spiritual therapists who, like the new religions, mainly seek the first element rather than the second. In this perspective, my adaptation of Paul Heelas's spectrum of world-rejecting/spirituality-as-rare-gift contrasted to world-affirming/ spirituality-as-cultivated-awakening can, in fact, be conceived as a spectrum between the spiritual therapists who emphasize magic and those who focus on self-cultivation.

My analysis of the significant connection between the spiritual therapists' understanding of spirituality and the Japanese belief in self-cultivation will not be complete if I do not also mention the important part played by the idea of *shūyō* in Japanese economic life. As Ornatowski demonstrates, the efforts of powerful industrialists of the late nineteenth-early twentieth century, such as Shibusawa Eichi, to 'synthesize Confucian morality with modern business principles' (1998, 354) led, in the post-war period, to the definition of self-cultivation in terms of work duties<sup>115</sup>. This transformation manifested itself in the development of particular business training programmes in which hardship and pain gained through the practice of familiar activities were made particularly difficult, such as for example cleaning the floor while

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<sup>115</sup> Although this sounds similar to Weber's thesis of the Protestant work ethic, sociologists of religion have dismissed the applicability of this thesis to Japan's case and have pointed to the limitations of Weber's theory, namely, to the fact that the Japanese early modern ethic was a 'philosophy of the heart', devoid of a purely religious goal (Shimazono, 2004, 43), and that toleration was more significant in allowing economic development rather than religious activism (Davis, 1992, 139). Davis also points out that the Japanese ethic of work rose and achieved national significance only after economic development; it was thus an ethic for a society with an embedded economy (ibid, 144).

singing, and were meant to foster maturity of the self and promote the accommodation into the roles required by the company (Kondo, 1987, 268). Today's "spiritual business" is the expression *par excellence* of - and can be considered as the next step in - this process of "sacralisation" of economic goals, which are sustained through sacred means, namely self-cultivation. However, when the alternatives proposed by the spiritual therapists to help "awaken" their clients collide with the objectives of social harmony, which had characterised self-cultivation to date, issues of identity arise, as demonstrated in the next section.

### **6.3. Elaboration of alternatives: Americanism<sup>116</sup> and Nationalism**

Spirituality as an awakening to a new consciousness stems directly from the desired outcome of every spiritual therapy session to foster alternative ways of thinking and living. As the testimonies from DNA activation sessions described in section 5.4 demonstrate, the therapeutic encounter with Mr Ushimoto was the beginning of a series of life-changes that transcended the original reasons for which the clients decided to undertake DNA activation. *Kizuku* (become aware) is the keyword that all spiritual therapists repeated in their explanation of sample cases that they had treated. And although websites and books are full of cosmological explanations for the improvement of a client's status (as in Mr Ushimoto's case), during the interviews with the spiritual therapists, it was the psychological reasoning given to the patient that was stressed. Trauma, lack of self-confidence, lack of communication with family and relatives, repetition of the same mistakes and, above all, a self-imposed repression due to one's cultural background: being Japanese today was definitely seen as a problem.

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<sup>116</sup> I used here the term in its sense of 'devotion to or preference for the U.S. and its institutions' (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Americanism>, visited 13 August 2010).

Spiritual advisor, Mr Suzuki, summarized this reasoning as follows: ‘Everyone wants to have an average life (*heikinteki na jinsei*) according to Japanese standards. You know how many women come complaining that they are not married and saying “I’m already 30! (*mō 30 da shi!*)”?’ An aura therapist, Ms Fukuda expressed similar ideas: ‘Japanese do not show their true self; they repress it, repress it until it becomes unbearable (*nihonjin wa hontō no jibun o dasanaide, osaete, osaete, tsuraku natte kita [sic] made*)’. The sisters Ms Chizuko and Ms Momoyama also repeated the same idea by characterizing Japan as a nation of *gaman* (endurance) and went on to analyse the social circumstances that bring Japanese women to the doorstep of their salon (see Chapter 7). ‘It (life) was not meant to be like that! (*sonna hazu ja nakatta!*)’ are the words metaphysiotherapist Ms Kimura often hears from her ‘typically Japanese’ clients.

The existence of this self-criticism, which identifies nationality as the cause of distress for the majority of clients, is undoubtedly a result of the strong influx of Western (mainly American) ideas originating from the translations of New Age books and talks by foreign “spiritual teachers”. As has been observed with fiction and non-fiction literature in general, ‘Japan has been a country of excessive importation, not excessive exportation’ (Takayuki, 2000, 229) and this has led, to a certain extent, to a Japanese acceptance of the rise of post-modern Orientalism (ibid, 231). As already indicated in section 3.1, it is mainly foreign authors who are read and remembered by the spiritual therapists, and even though Ehara Hiroyuki’s publications have been extremely popular, they are never valued as highly as the spiritualist theories of the West. In fact, Ehara himself reinforces this Western superiority by saying that his “spiritualism” is based on the code of the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain which he had to ‘make simpler if he wanted Japanese people to understand it’ (2007a, 11).

Ms Smith, the American head of a school of channelling who has lived in Japan since 1983, criticized Japanese people for not talking about their issues even to their closest friends. 'I often sit in a coffee shop and listen to their conversations and all I hear is them talking about other people whom they know. In Japan, you can really feel lonely while being surrounded by a crowd of people'. Ms Smith therefore promotes what Paul Heelas considers to be the positive aspect of holistic healing, namely the values of expressivist humanism:

The "freedom" component of the ethic of humanity fuses with self-expressive freedom. The "egalitarian" component of the ethic of humanity fuses with the theme of spiritual unity, and thus equality. Egalitarian respect for the other permits self-expression (...) The voice of ethical authority is experienced as coming from within: (...) this voice (...) derives from the internalization of formalistic renderings of the ethic of humanity (...), but it is experienced as "natural" (...) The ethic of humanity is so to speak "expressivized" (2008, 30-31).

However, for Wouter J. Hanegraaff, who sees the globalization of New Age spirituality as an aspect of global Americanization, these values are American and therefore the idea of a globalization of spirituality is not only impossible to realize but also dangerous (2001, 27). How does this difference of academic opinion translate on the ground, in the practice of spiritual therapy in Japan?

For a minority of practitioners who have maintained a strong relationship with their Western tutors through, for example, a continuous involvement in the events organised by their "spiritual academies", such as the graduates of RMMS or Theta Healing Japan, this "American individualism" is the key to happiness. It usually takes the form of rebellion against, and subsequent negation of, activities and relations to individuals deemed threatening to one's "spiritual freedom": Ms Kayama divorced; Ms

Hirayama left her parents' home and her civil servant's job; Ms Miwa left her job and spends six months a year on the small island of Miyako, 2,500 km away from her husband (who lives in Sapporo); Mr Takahashi left his job and has never gone back to see his parents. However, for the majority of today's spiritual therapists who, like Ms Saeda, have started noticing what they consider to be the detrimental effects of such a blind individualism ('women should stop divorcing because some American told them to do so'), the elaboration of alternatives does not rely so much on Heelas's self-expressive freedom, but on his theme of spiritual unity, interpreted by the spiritual therapists to mean a perennialism (see section 1.1), but one which is especially familiar to Japanese culture, if not stemming from it. This is where we come back to Shimazono's argument regarding the nationalistic features of the new spirituality culture in Japan, which we can observe in the writings and sayings, of famous spiritual therapists.

Ehara Hiroyuki argues that Japan is a country that ranks high on a spiritual level because the belief in an "invisible world" is part of the Japanese national character (*kokuminsei*). And the popular spiritual counsellor continues by saying that the Japanese people used to value the power of Nature and the supernatural, but that the consumerism introduced in the post-war period made them reject their roots (2007b, 160-161). Kondō Kazuo, one of the most prolific translators of English spiritualist and New Age books<sup>117</sup> places the particularity of the Japanese people in their physiology and especially their brain, which, he argues, does not distinguish between reason and natural instincts, as does the Western brain (2006, 81). The above arguments could fit perfectly into the

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<sup>117</sup> He has translated at least 50 publications, including the 12 volumes of the texts that were dictated to famous spiritualist and founding editor of the weekly British newspaper *Psychic News*, Maurice Barbanell, by his Indian spirit guide, the 3,000-year-old Silver Birch.



*nihonjiron* (discourse on being Japanese) neo-nationalist literature that proliferated in the 1980s and which Shimazono identifies as the first and foremost example of the post-modern “religionisation” of the individual (*kojin no shūkyōka*) (2007b, 305). But are the majority of spiritual therapists who, like Ms Momoko, claim that ‘Japanese is a fundamentally spiritual culture because the essence of the Shintō religion is a blend of polytheism and animism’, really nationalists?

‘Not particularly’ would be my first answer. The reason is that I consider many of these arguments to be repetitions of what these therapists have heard from their Anglo-American teachers and what they believe a foreign researcher who asks questions such as ‘Why do you think “the spiritual” is so popular in Japan?’ wants to hear. As already pointed out, most of the spiritual therapists have spent a considerable time abroad (Ms Momoko attended various spiritual academies across the USA during a four-year stay and is currently a teacher at the Japanese branch of the Barbara Brennan School of Healing) and have frequent contacts with non-Japanese, which is not the case for a large proportion of the Japanese population. If, however, we were to consider such statements regarding Japanese uniqueness as nationalism, this would certainly be of the multicultural type.

Sugimoto Yoshio remarks that, since the 1980s, a multicultural nationalism can be perceived in many mainstream media discourses among the urban middle class as well as the large corporations and the Japanese government. One of the defining features of this multicultural nationalism, according to Sugimoto, is that ‘it requires internationalist symbols to consolidate itself (...) even English-language education in Japanese schools is compatible with multicultural nationalism to the degree to which it exaggerates differences between Japanese and English and attributes these differences to the

“national character” of the Japanese’ (2006, 483). In this perspective therefore the comments of the spiritual therapists may just be echoing what Michal Daliot-Bul has called the ‘Japan Brand Strategy’: the efforts of the Japanese government during the last decade to increase its soft power by supporting the export of cultural products such as *manga* and *anime* and also to rehabilitate Japan with the encouragement of national pride (2009, 261). However, if multicultural nationalism remained, for a variety of reasons, situational in my conversations with the spiritual therapists, on the other hand monocultural nationalism, when clearly expressed, tends to form the basis for the elaboration of alternatives proposed by the practitioner and therefore is suffused into everything (s)he says. The following three cases correspond to three sub-types of unflinching nationalism in Japanese spiritual therapy, but the ages of these individuals is hopefully a sign that, at least in this domain, nationalism in its classic sense is disappearing.

The first case of Ms Minami’s community (see also section 2.3) formed in 1978 and called *tenmyōdō shinkyōkai* (The Church of Dawn’s Moral Sense) is a typical example of a *reinōsha*-founded religious group that could have developed into a new religion, but has either lacked sufficient membership or, as the frequent visits to the headquarters of Shintō Taikyō<sup>118</sup> seem to suggest, Ms Minami does not want to lose official Shintō support. Nevertheless, the teachings of Ms Minami, as it transpired from my discussions with her, present the same nationalistic features as those identified in

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<sup>118</sup> Shimazono explains that after the Meiji restoration under the leadership of the newly installed Emperor, the new government of Japan, wishing to revive the Shintō rituals and under Western pressure for religious freedom, divided Shintō facilities and groups into two categories: Shrine Shinto (considered as the facilities for public rites but not as religion) and Sect Shintō (considered as religions with the same legal status as Buddhism and Christianity) (Shimazono, 2007a, 698-699). Shintō Taikyō is one of the 13 sects of Sect Shintō, which due to the continuous appearance of new religious movements, has since the end of WWII lost its vigour (*Encyclopedia of Shintō*, <http://eos.kokugakuin.ac.jp/modules/xwords/entry.php?entryID=652>, visited on 18 June 2010).

other new religions such as World Mate, Agonshū, or Kōfuku no Kagaku, namely ‘unchanging ethnic traits, the continuity of bloodlines, and the nation regarded as an immense organism’ (McVeigh, 2004, 243). Regarding spiritual therapy, proper ancestor worship consisted for Ms Minami in the ultimate alternative to every issue brought up by her clients. The first questions that Ms Minami asks in her sessions have to do with whether or not one knows where one’s grand-parents’ graves are located and whether or not these are properly maintained. The answer to these questions will influence the subsequent advice of Ms Minami, and, so far, this can be seen as a typical attitude of any *reinōsha*. The nationalistic element emerged at the end of the session (which I had the opportunity to observe) when Ms Minami always blamed Japanese youth for having forgotten their roots, having been “Americanized” and suggested that everyone should honour the war dead by frequently visiting the Yasukuni shrine<sup>119</sup> and giving donations. Monthly visits of Ms Minami’s church followers to Yasukuni shrine attest to such convictions<sup>120</sup>.

Next to this typical example of Shintō-based religious nationalism among Japanese spiritual therapists, one finds a more active and expressive nationalism in the case of Mr Kimura. Self-proclaimed as ‘the modern Kūkai<sup>121</sup> who will save Japan’, Mr

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<sup>119</sup> The fact that WWII Class A war criminals are enshrined in Yasukuni has turned this shrine into an object of nationalist discourse and also political turmoil whenever the Prime Minister of Japan pays a visit.

<sup>120</sup> I had the opportunity to accompany Ms Minami’s group on their official monthly visit to Yasukuni shrine in late January 2009. Approximately 80 members were present and walked in rows of three behind Ms Minami, her husband, and Ms Minami’s father who is the official head of the Church, but is almost never present at regular meetings. Each of us had to make a donation that I estimate to have averaged ¥10,000. A brief purification ritual was held inside the shrine and at the end Ms Minami gave a brief speech to the group about the greatness of the Japanese nation.

<sup>121</sup> Founder of the Shingon school of Buddhism and posthumously known as Kōbo Daishi (774-835), he is one of the most revered intellectuals in Japanese history.

Kimura was a business consultant who after having lost his family (through a divorce) and job at the age of forty, claims to have been directly entrusted by the spirit of Kūkai to save Japan. In 1985, Mr Kimura became a *reinōsha* and by 2009 he claimed that he had advised nearly 10,000 people and, while still heading his business consultation company, had become a philanthropist and founder of a university-type institution that taught Mr Kimura's theories. Although based in Hiroshima, Mr Kimura, dressed in a monk's robe, toured the country to speak about his 'spiritual manual for self-development'. Sitting next to him at one of these events, I had the opportunity to listen to one of Mr Kimura's talks about Japan being the centre of the world, about how the government of the Edo period (1600-1868) tortured the Christians because they wanted to turn Japanese women into prostitutes and about drugs being useless against all mental illnesses because those are always due to matters related to the world of the spirits.

Mr Kimura's elaboration of alternatives follows the pattern adopted by virtually all nationalistic mobilisations, namely the juxtaposition of three elements: a glorious past, a degraded present and a utopian future (Levinger and Lytle, 2001, 178). This pattern which reminds us of the fundamental occultural idea of the coming of a New Age is used by Mr Kimura to convince his clients that as Japanese they are the only people to have always been spiritually powerful, that they have forgotten it but that now is the time to awaken this "Japanese spirituality" and instigate the beginning of a New Age for Japan and ultimately for the rest of the world.

Mr Kimura's extremist views coexist with a final type of monocultural nationalism found among the older generation of spiritual therapists, that of "we, Asia, will save them, the West". Ms Okubo, *reinōsha*, head of a non-profit organisation which

started by selling natural salt made in Niigata and has now expanded to fund Ms Okubo's trips in and outside of Japan, believes in a world conspiracy to hide from the Japanese their special "spiritual status" and their intimate historic relationship with ancient civilizations from the Chinese to the Jews and Egyptians. Ms Okubo has recently gained the financial support of an underground *yakuza* boss (whose six children, aged 6 to 12, proudly repeated in front of me the Imperial Rescript on Education<sup>122</sup>) and promotes the idea in her lectures and books, with titles such as "The Orient's infinite culture will save the World", that the secret of Japan's spiritual power lies in the esoteric meanings of the Japanese language and Japanese history which has been distorted by the official sources. If this conspiracy is brought to light, the Japanese will realize their full potential and will lead the other Asian countries to a New Age.

These last three cases remain an exception among Japanese spiritual therapists who, as I have previously shown, mainly express a situational multicultural nationalism that consists both of a reaction to Western New Age ideals and of an elaboration of what they deem a more appropriate alternative for their Japanese clients. In the next section I will discuss the effects of these alternatives.

#### **6.4. Actualization of change: efficacy as subject of narrative and object of consumption**

Discussing efficacy with spiritual therapists always leads to vague answers that usually place responsibility on the client rather than the practitioner. In section 5.3, I discussed this attitude of the therapists who consider that only individual decision-making matters

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<sup>122</sup> Designed in 1890 by the Emperor to promote the moral standards of a modern Japan (see <http://www.japanesehistory.de/Documents/KyoikuChokugo.htm> for an English translation). The Rescript was abandoned during the rebuilding of the country in the late 1940s, and has since been considered as a symbol of nationalism and far right activities.

and that their role is merely that of an interpreter. Eric Pearl, the “inventor” of reconnection healing and one of the most popular teachers in Japan today, explains this clause of non-responsibility as follows:

So what does it mean when a healing session does not produce the anticipated results? (...) I now believe that everyone does receive a healing – albeit not necessarily the one they expected to have. Recognizing that “healing” means reconnecting with the perfection of the universe, we realize that the universe knows what we need to receive and what we are to gain as a result of it. The thing is, what we need may not always correspond with what we expect or think we want (2001, 122).

According to Pearl, healing always occurs but its manifestation is argued to depend on whether the client can “realize” its existence. Healing therefore means awareness: rather than the explanatory narratives shown in Chapter 5, it is the act of elaborating those alternative narratives that leads to therapeutic results. Let us look at two “successful” cases to illustrate the above argument.

Ms Etō was one of the few clients I had the opportunity to interview on their own. Aged 55, she was married to a wealthy man and had two children in their twenties. Several years ago she had decided to find a job and had become a cosmetics consultant selling her products from door to door and also inviting customers to her house for demonstrations. ‘It is a very stressful job. People always come late to appointments, they always complain and my house has become my office’, she observed. Wishing to stop working, Ms Etō was nevertheless unable to find the courage to do so and started consulting various spiritual therapists to solve her stress issues. Through this process she started accumulating reasons to change her lifestyle and, while some contradicted her commitments (Ms Etō hated for example the fortune-tellers who suggested that her husband was responsible for her situation), a few reinforced her convictions about her

being unfit for that job. One day, Ms Etō met Mr Suzuki, the spiritual advisor practising near Shinjuku station, and his ‘kind manner’ and ‘understanding tone’ encouraged her to take the final decision to quit her job. Ms Etō did not seem to remember the reasons with which Mr Suzuki led her towards that decision, but she recalled that Mr Suzuki, by ‘telling her things she had never thought about’, made her finally feel satisfied with herself.

The second case of Mr Fujiwara was reported in the short online survey that I conducted among nine clinical psychiatrists in late March 2009. Mr Fujiwara was one of the patients of a survey respondent. He was brought into the clinic of this psychiatrist after the generalist doctor could find no physiological explanation for the constant shaking of Mr Fujiwara’s body. The patient was then diagnosed with dysautonomia<sup>123</sup> (*jiritsu shinkei shitchō-shō*) due to stress at work and was given a drug treatment to take at home. However, the persistence of symptoms provoked Mr Fujiwara’s extensive leave from work and a temporary estrangement from his wife until one day, his family accompanied him to a local *reinōsha* who succeeded in healing his condition. The psychiatrist narrated that when he asked Mr Fujiwara why he thought his health had improved, the latter listed various reasons offered by the spiritual therapist, from being his unlucky year (*yakudoshi*) to being possessed by a spirit. Again, we notice the importance placed on elaborating narratives rather than on finding the “right” cause for one’s problem.

If we were therefore to define the minimal efficacy of spiritual therapies, it would be their ability to operate on the margin of disability by using the elaboration of

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<sup>123</sup> A disorder of the autonomic nervous system (ANS) function (from <http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/dysautonomia/dysautonomia.htm>, visited 20 June 2010).

alternative narratives to induce what Thomas J. Csordas calls ‘a modulation of somatic attention (...) a modulation of orientation in the world, so that one monitors one’s symptoms and responds to them by modifying one’s activities. This reorientation not only preserves but actually constitutes the healing’ (1994, 70). Here we find the reason why “becoming aware” and “spirituality” have become synonyms for the members of this new spirituality culture who, as Shimazono observes, have replaced the traditional religious concern for salvation (*sukui*) with “self-transformation” (*jiko hennyō*) and “healing” (*iyashi*) (2007b, 63). And from this perspective, the moral statements constantly proffered by Ehara Hiroyuki and other spiritual therapists (see section 5.3) play the role of codified agents which sustain or, in some cases, re-launch this modulation of somatic attention.

Nevertheless, the high percentage of repeaters among clients (see section 3.3) and the proliferation of types of therapies could be interpreted as a failure of this grande narrative of spirituality to even reach the aforementioned minimum efficacy of spiritual therapy. This may be due to several factors, such as the fashion aspect of the spiritual in Japan (see Chapter 7). Here, however, I will discuss another element that may explain this shift of focus; it is what Azuma Hiroki has called the difference between the modern and the post-modern man: ‘the modern man was a narrative animal. People were able to satisfy their thirst for “the meaning of life” peculiar to humanity through a likewise peculiarly human means: sociality’ (2009 [2001], 95). Sociality, indeed, is a significant element in the process of healing. Ms Etō would have never even considered quitting her job if her son had not supported the arguments made by Mr Suzuki and it was his family that brought Mr Fujiwara to the *reinōsha*. In addition, seventeen out of the 20 followers and former clients of Ms Minami confessed to having been supported



by friends or family during their therapy, and the majority of spiritual therapists, such as Ms Kimura for example, tended to remember successful cases who by chance had also become their friends.

In accordance with this significance of sociality, Csordas stipulates that the process of healing is 'motivated by (1) the conviction of divine power and the committed participant's desire to demonstrate it in himself, as well as by (2) the support of the assembly and its acclamation for a supplicant's testimony of healing' (1994, 71). However, the post-modern man has come to focus on (1) rather than (2). As Azuma argues, Japanese life is overwhelmingly more convenient than in the past and consumer needs are satisfied immediately and mechanically without the intervention of the other. Hence, 'sociality is sustained not by actual necessity, but by interest in particular kinds of information' (2009 [2001], 93). In the case of spiritual therapy, this shift points to the fact that clients consume the explanatory models provided by the practitioners without adhering to the grande narrative of spirituality and fail thus to reach a modulation of somatic attention. They have become, in Azuma's words, 'database animals'.

Azuma uses the social group called *otaku* to demonstrate his theory. The term *otaku* refers to a sub-culture 'of Japanese, usually males and generally between the ages of 18 and 40, who fanatically consume, produce, and collect comic books (*manga*), animated films (*anime*), and other products related to these forms of popular visual culture' (ibid, xv). The *otaku* culture is filled with derivative works (amateur/fan-made magazines, games, figurines and so on) which are produced and consumed as if they were of equal value with the original products that inspired them and which they are attempting to imitate. Beneath these derivative works (or *simulacra*) exists a database of story settings and characters which is used to distinguish good *simulacra* from bad ones,

and beneath that first database lies a second database of *moe* (fascination)-elements, such as a particular way of speaking, particular clothing, or the specific curves of an animation character. Azuma argues that, in contrast to previous generations, the cultural consumption of the *otaku* today revolves, not around the giving of meaning by a grande narrative (for example, one particular animation series as a whole), but around the combination of elements (which may consist for example of the main character of the series, or of the high-school setting where the story takes place, or of the theme of the story such as the everyday life of a boy with supernatural powers) extracted from the database: ‘they simply demand works in which their favourite *moe*-elements are presented in their favourite narratives’ (ibid, 92).

Returning to the spiritual therapists, I could argue that the first database of *simulacra* corresponds to the various spiritual therapies, and the second database of *moe*-elements reminds us of explanatory models, such as ‘it’s your unlucky year’, ‘you were stoned to death in your previous life’ or ‘your DNA is not activated’, which are built by using what Paul Heelas has called the *lingua franca*, a database of concepts such as “higher self”, “past-life”, “chakra”, “aura” and so on which are found in every theory and practice within the new spirituality culture (1996, 2). In keeping with Azuma’s observations however, the last generation of practitioners and fervent users of alternative therapies seem to have lost interest in the grande narrative, and simply seek its favourite explanatory models and locate them in combinations of new therapies, thus provoking the constant diversification of types of sessions and ways of conducting them, a tendency that has become characteristic of the last decade’s “spiritual boom”. The change of topics figuring on the front page of “spiritual” magazines, for example, attests to such a tendency. In its first years, *Star People*, a quarterly magazine published

since 2001, seems to have preferred general titles about the transformation of the individual and society such as ‘who am I?’ (Winter 2001), ‘what is light body?’ (Summer 2002) and ‘a society self-perpetuated through the spiritual’ (Autumn 2001) or ‘praying for peace’ (Winter 2003). Recently, however, the magazine has become, as aura reader Ms Noda described it to me, ‘maniac’ (*maniakku*-manic), exploring in-depth the explanatory models of spiritual therapies rather than the ideals on which those are based: hence recent titles such as ‘seeking the capacity of immortality’ (Autumn 2009) or ‘looking for the key to Human evolution: DNA Activation’ (Spring 2010).

The fourth axis characterizing the cosmology of spiritual therapists can thus be conceived as spanning from the one end, where the effectiveness of spiritual therapy is based on a successful combination of both elements of Csordas’ healing process, to the other end, where sociality is missing from the healing process and therapeutic concerns have been replaced by a database consumption of spiritual therapies. It is unarguably easier to find cases characterizing this latter end and I here provide two examples.

Six weeks before I returned to the UK, I happened to meet the Japanese housewife who had introduced me to Mr Suzuki and who told me that she had just been to seek his advice again the previous week. ‘He has lost his powers. It just feels like counselling now’, my friend exclaimed. Despite Mr Suzuki’s support, which in the past had been deemed valuable in allowing her to come to terms with her husband’s wish to have a second child, this woman had now completely lost interest in Mr Suzuki because his preliminary “readings” (see section 5.3) started revealing themselves as wrong. With the absence of sociality, the minimum effectiveness of spiritual therapy relies entirely on the conviction of the existence of divine power; hence, if that is also lacking, the user will move to the consumption of another simulacrum/spiritual therapy.

Ms Smith (the American spiritual teacher)'s story of the dispute between two Japanese "channels" of Bashar suggests that the above tendency started very early in the development of the new spirituality culture in Japan. Bashar is the name of 'a multi-dimensional extra-terrestrial being who speaks through channel Darryl Anka from what we perceive as the future'<sup>124</sup>. As mentioned in section 4.1, Daryl Anka came to Japan for the first time in May 1987 and spoke in front of more than a thousand people. Ms Smith remembers that, later that year, two housewives made their appearance and claimed to be receiving messages from Bashar, which enabled them to gather a strong following. One of them, Takehara Sayuri is mentioned as the pioneer Japanese channeller in Fujita Shōichi's photo-book of the various types of *reinōsha* active in Japan in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Fujita, 1992, 71-82). But, while Takehara still seems to be active today<sup>125</sup>, the other woman, whose name has been forgotten, was soon persecuted by the fans of Takehara and stopped her activities. 'That is the problem with the Japanese', concluded Ms Smith. 'Instead of caring about the channelled entity, they focus on the channel'.

## **6.5. Conclusion: the world of spiritual therapy**

This chapter has attempted to identify four general patterns in the guidelines and ideas that characterise the current practices of spiritual therapy in Japan. Every pattern or configuration is considered to build on the previous one and it is argued that their combination describes the "style" of spiritual therapy (from conservative to liberal) that Japanese spiritual therapists adhere to in their daily practices. By assigning an arbitrary

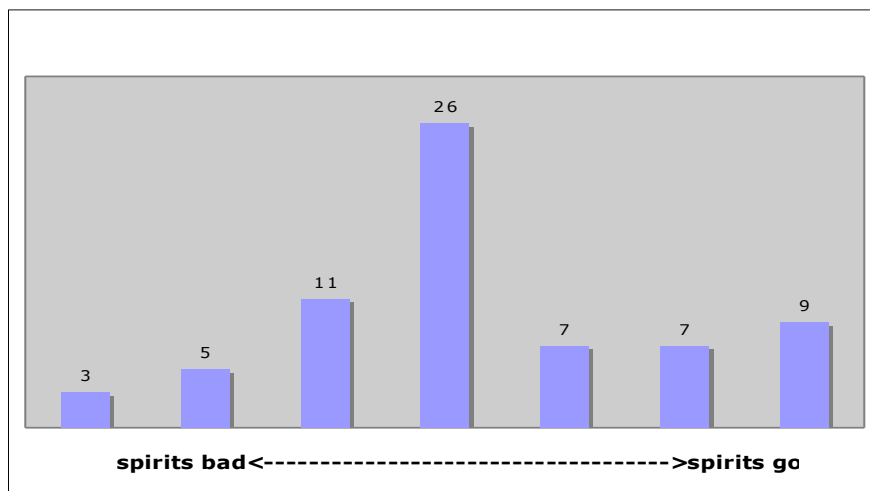
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<sup>124</sup> From the official website of Bashar <http://www.bashar.org/> (visited 20 June 2010).

<sup>125</sup> See <http://www.2013net.com/bashar/profile.html> (visited 20 June 2010).

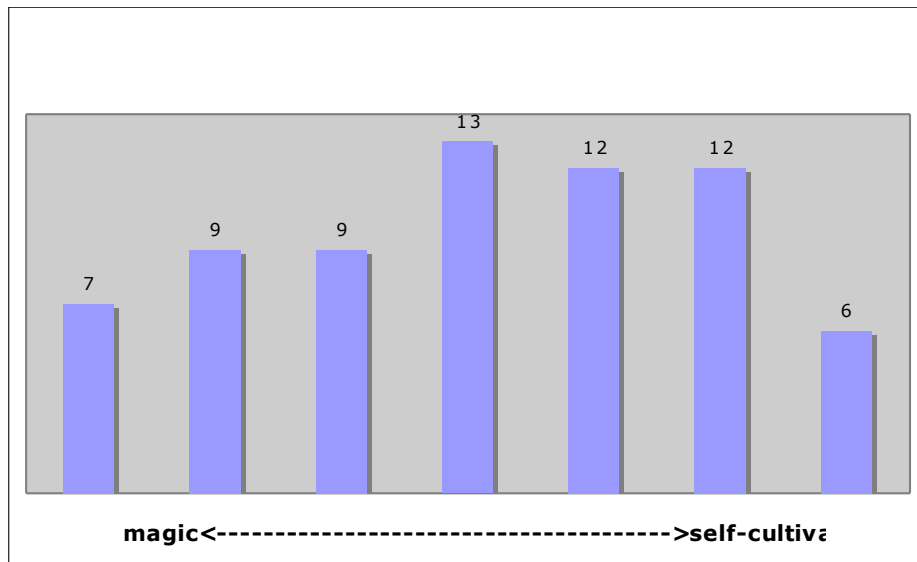
value to every spiritual therapist, I have tried to represent graphically four continua or axes, namely “spirits are bad”-”spirits are good” (axis 1), magic-self-cultivation (axis 2), nationalism-Americanism (axis 3) and grande spiritual narrative-database consumption (axis 4). After a short discussion accompanying every graph, I conclude my analysis of the guiding principles of Japanese spiritual therapy by noting that a composite axis made up of the sum of values corresponding to each practitioner shows what can be termed as a trend towards the “liberalization” of the phenomenon.

Graph 6.1 Axis 1



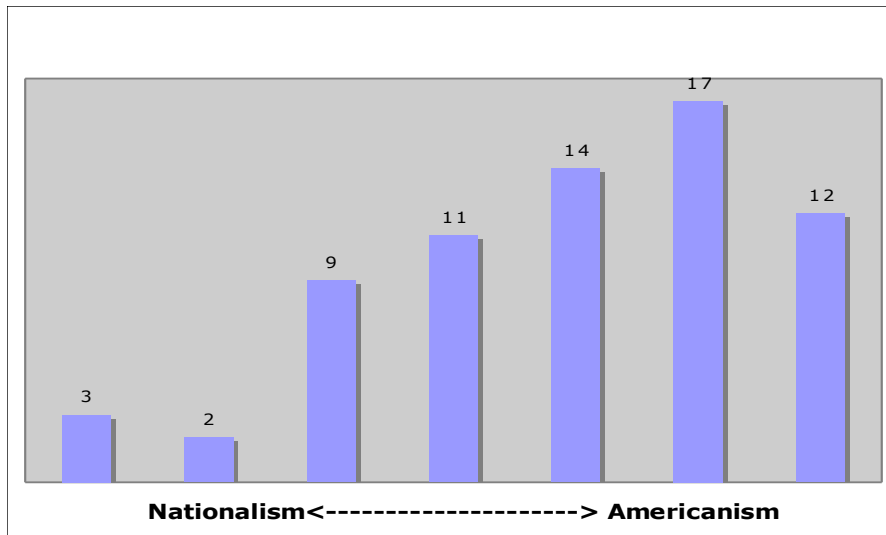
The first graph demonstrates that the shift in the image of spirits held by the spiritual therapists has been slow because the legacy of bad spirits still clings to many of them, particularly those such as Ms Sakura or Ms Suzuki who believe themselves to be descendants of *reinōsha*. The large number of practitioners who did not express any opinion on the nature of the spirit world also suggests that there is a small group of people for whom spiritual therapy does not require the intervention of beings other than the therapist and the client. This minority usually specializes in energy therapies and massage.

Graph 6.2 Axis 2

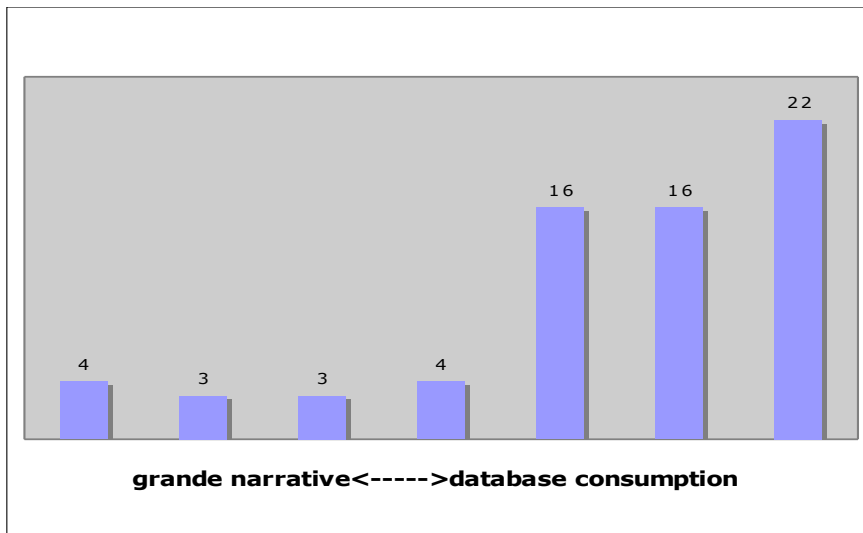


The second axis shows another interesting feature that enriches our understanding of how the concept of spirituality changes through time. Indeed, besides those who do not give particular emphasis to either of the two meanings of spirituality identified in section 6.2 and who, thus, are primarily interested in the business aspect of the profession (middle of axis), we notice that some spiritual therapists tend over time to return to an “elitist” view of “being spiritual”. This is of course a hypothesis, but the cases of Mr Takahashi or Ms Fukuyama, who have both reached the highest levels in their schools of healing (Theta Healing and Reconnection respectively), show a tendency towards feeling special and abandoning the idea that anyone can reach a “stage” of spirituality similar to their own. This is no surprise when we consider that the increasing competitiveness in the spiritual business has contributed to making those therapists who have succeeded in keeping a regular clientele more self-conscious about their abilities.

Graph 6.3 Axis 3



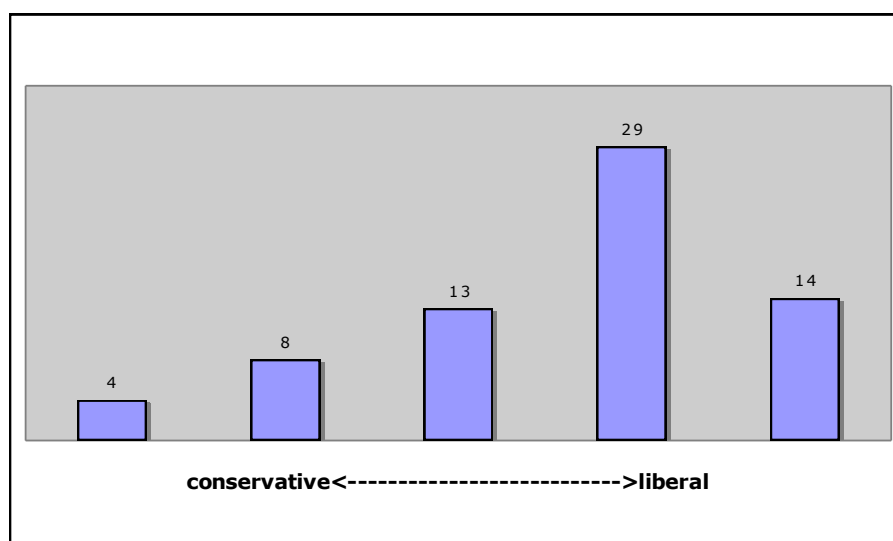
Graph 6.4 Axis 4



The next two figures clearly represent the discussions of sections 6.3 and 6.4. In conceptual terms, graph 6.3 shows the anticipated minority of monocultural nationalism, while those who express a multicultural nationalism (often situational) occupy the middle of the axis and the other end of the axis hints at the overwhelming American-oriented tendency of spiritual therapists. The adherence to a database

consumption of spiritual therapies which was also foreseen is depicted in graph 6.4 and explains the recent exponential growth of the spiritual business in Japan.

Graph 6.5 Composite axis



If we use the term “conservative” to characterise the composite trend of the “spirits are bad-magic-nationalism-grande spiritual narrative” elements and we refer to the composite set of principles of the other end of the four continua, namely “spirits are good-self-cultivation-Americanism-database consumption” as “liberal”, we can conclude that the spiritual therapy phenomenon is characterised by a slow liberalization of a set of principles, a process which clearly mirrors the social changes in Japanese society to which I turn in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that I am fully aware of the bias that may be involved in this conclusion. As already stated in section 3.4, the sample of spiritual therapists was never considered to be representative of the entire profession and it is quite possible that the significant liberalization trend observed in this chapter merely reflects the type of practitioner who agreed to be interviewed. I believe, however, that the continua described here are characteristic of the Japanese practice of spiritual



therapy and that the liberalization of this practice has significantly contributed to the popularisation of the spiritual therapy phenomenon. I will further demonstrate this argument by linking this analysis to Japanese social conditions and consider several processes observed so far: for example, the increase in the number of professional spiritual therapists noted in Chapter 4, the psychocultural themes that account for the functional role of spiritual therapy in Chapter 5, and the social standards for which the Japanese clients are blamed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 will therefore discuss the ultimate objective of this research, namely to identify, in phenomena characterizing Japanese society today, the reasons for the increasing popularity of spiritual therapy.

## **Chapter 7: Spiritual Therapy and Japanese Society**

For many prominent students of the New Age Movement, the “market” aspect of the phenomenon, which I examined in detail in chapter 4, must form the basis for any argument regarding the origins and development of the New Age. This is one of the reasons why the spiritual business was my entry point for the analysis of spiritual therapy. Announcing the more critical arguments developed by Carrette and King (see conclusion of chapter 4), Michael York, for example, has argued that ‘the New Age is modelled upon, and is an outgrowth of, liberal Western capitalism. It is part of the same cultural logic of late capitalism that asserts the right to free and unrestricted global trade’ (2001, 367). Such claims hint at the existence of a close connection between the new spirituality culture and local socio-economic conditions. Indeed, in the United States, the New Age has been considered as carried by and transmitted through the baby boom generation (1946-1964) who were the first to feel the impact of mass communications, and who, after being raised in prosperity, came of age ‘when the U.S.A. was trying to solve some of its most serious moral problems (racial segregation, the war in Vietnam, and the inequality of women)’ (Brown, 1992, 92).

This American observation proved itself true for the United Kingdom too, where the most extensive and comprehensive survey of New Agers, conducted by Stuart Rose in 1994-95 among 908 readers of the UK’s widest-selling New Age magazine *Kindred Spirit*, revealed three distinguishable socio-demographic factors: ‘first, almost without exception, participants are middle-class; secondly, almost three-quarters of the New

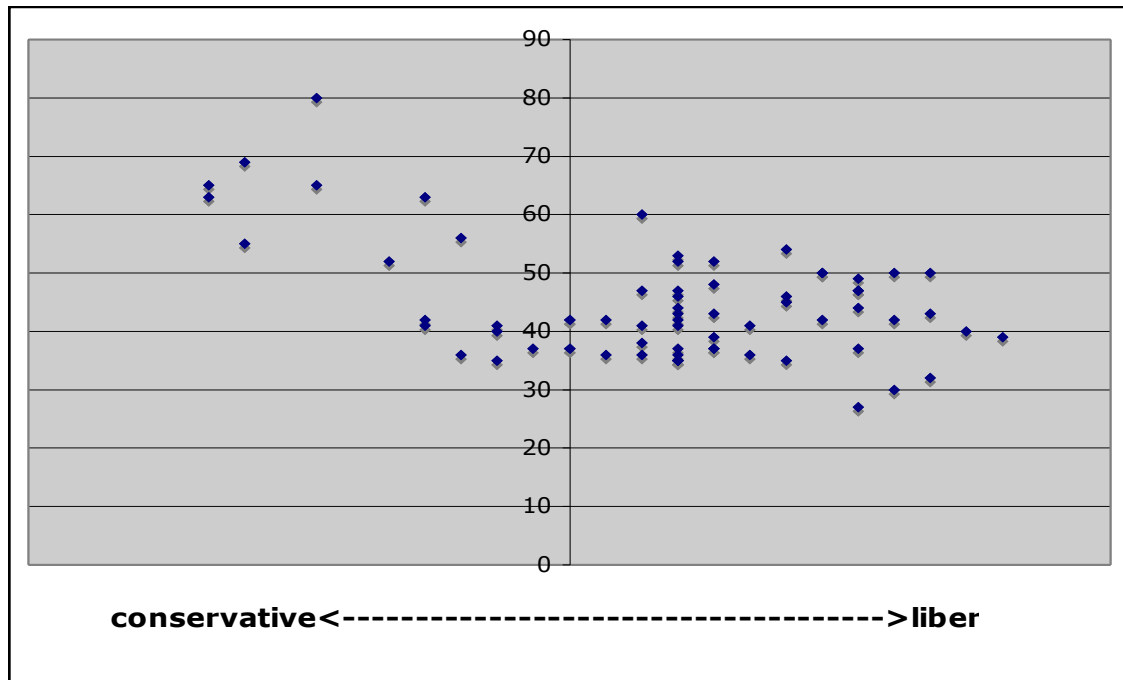
Age population are women; and thirdly, over half are middle-aged<sup>126</sup> (Rose, 1998, 11). Thirteen years ago, in Japan, Yumiyama Tatsuya reached similar conclusions regarding the fans of “the world of the spiritual” (*seishin sekai*) and suggested that the age range he observed, which spanned from the late twenties to early forties, may have represented two generations of Japanese New Agers: the originators of the movement who grew up in the counter-culture era of the 1970s, and the consumers of the movement who were in their late twenties at the time of the study (1997, 36).

The importance of the generational aspect becomes obvious when we compare the age of the spiritual therapists with the composite continuum of ideological tendencies characterizing the practice of spiritual therapy in Japan. Figure 7.1 below shows the expected result that the right/liberal part of the axis contains a younger group of practitioners than the left/conservative end. Starting with Rose’s third socio-demographic factor, the second section of this chapter will provide an analysis of the generational aspect of the phenomenon in Japan from a socio-economic point of view.

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<sup>126</sup> Paul Heelas accepts that the sample might be biased because younger people are less likely to subscribe to a magazine, but he considers that ‘the fact that 57 per cent are aged between 35 and 54, this comparing with the 6 per cent aged between 25 and 34, the 2.5 per cent aged under 24 and the 14 per cent aged between 55 and 64, is highly suggestive’ (1996, 125).

Graph 7.1 Age and ideology of spiritual therapists



Following Rose's findings, the third section of this chapter will turn to the reasons specific to the Japanese setting and which account for the presence of a majority of women among the spiritual therapists. Using I.M. Lewis's classic argument that 'we may expect to find central shamanic cults in societies whose members are, in their total politic-economic setting, under acute pressure' (1989, 182) and reflecting on the words of spiritual therapists such as, for example, Ms Kikuko (section 3.3), Mr Takahashi (figure 3.8) and Mr Hirafuji (section 6.3), section 7.3 will argue that the recent popularisation of spiritual therapy can be explained by continuing gendered socio-economic inequalities.

These observations will be brought forward to the final section of this chapter to inform the debate about whether Rose's third finding is applicable to Japan, where for a long time the majority of Japanese have believed that they are middle-class; what Brian McVeigh has called 'middle-class nationalism' (2004, 242). Hence, in the last section I

will extend my analysis beyond the socio-economic dimension of spiritual therapy to include the changing and often conflicting perceptions of Japanese self and society which are often seen to give rise to the misfortunes inflicting the clients and for which spiritual therapists attempt to find solutions in their own particular ways. The discussion will attempt to address broader socio-psychological arguments regarding contemporary Japanese society, such as those of Kawanishi Yuko who argues that ‘distress emanating from the growing gap between rapid social change and outdated ways of coping, or the mismatch between conventional coping methods and what reality requires is rampant in modern Japan’ (2009, 7).

However, before delving deeper into the phenomenon, it is necessary to address the more superficial, but equally important aspect of spiritual therapy: its value as consumerist fashion. While, for example, the link between spiritual therapy and the ‘self-searching’ (*jibun sagashi*) fashion (Hayamizu, 2008) among Japanese youth will inform my identification of three different generations in section 7.2, the revelation that the “Ehara boom” originated in women’s magazines (Horie, 2008) will point to the discussion on gender in section 7.3; finally, the media-fuelled “medicalisation” of the effects of late capitalism on Japanese society, which were glossed as ‘diseases of modernization’ (*gendaibyō*) or ‘civilization’ (*bunmeibyō*) (Lock, 1996, 345) will provide a starting point for the discussion of the changing Japanese sense of self in section 7.4.

A sociological examination of spiritual therapy rounds up my analysis of the phenomenon by connecting the experiential and ideological perspectives to the business aspect of “the spiritual” and searches for the foundations of the popularity of spiritual therapy in Japanese society itself. Consequently, in the following and concluding

chapter, a theoretical model based on my findings will be developed for use in comparative studies.

### **7.1. Spiritual therapy: a fashion?**

In his study of Ehara Hiroyuki's rise to media stardom, Horie Norichika notes that Ehara started his career in 1992 as a columnist in the fortune-telling section of the magazine *An'an*, and, since his debut, he has targeted the readership of such magazines: single women in their twenties and thirties (2008, 43). This observation may partly explain, as we shall see in section 7.3, the age and marital status of the spiritual therapists and their clients, but more importantly it helps us to locate the spiritual therapy phenomenon within wider consumerist trends promoted in the media and which have appeared in Japanese society in the past two decades. In this section, I will look at the relation between these fashionable activities and “the spiritual” through three specific lenses: beauty culture, medicalisation, and *jibun sagashi* (self-searching).

Spiritual therapists overwhelmingly considered *Trinity* as the most popular and accessible magazine in their domain of interest. Published since 2001, *Trinity* sells on a quarterly basis approximately 4,000 copies and targets, as suggested by the website<sup>127</sup>, ‘flexible and vigorous women’. Indeed, like mainstream women’s publications such as *An'an* and other commercial magazines which appeared in the 1970s and claimed to be offering their young, urban, female readers ‘guidance and support about how to express themselves and attain a certain freedom’ (Sakamoto, 1999, 183), *Trinity* deals with the usual subjects of travel, fashion, interior design and health, but it does so through a “spiritual” prism. Typical contents include interviews with Japanese celebrities (mostly

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<sup>127</sup> <http://www.el-aura.com/>

women) who either reveal their out-of-this-world experiences or receive the advice of some type of spiritual therapist; travel articles on visiting national and international “spiritual spots” where the readers are promised that they will feel regenerated and empowered by their natural and supernatural beauty; columns on dietary products and activities which, if consumed or practised, provide both health and luck; new ways of decorating one’s house to attract good fortune; and finally, and most importantly, information on new and popular spiritual therapy salons.

Considering that half of every edition is printed in black and white and consists exclusively of salon advertisements for which spiritual therapists pay (see section 4.2), it is evident that *Trinity* relies on that income to survive rather than on its regular, but small readership. Its success, however, can be also attributed to another factor: its assumption of the interrelationship between mind, body and spirit (see table 5.2) in order to insert the spiritual into the thriving Japanese beauty culture. This is evident just by looking at the covers of various editions of *Trinity* (see figure 7.1) and it hints at the possibility that spiritual therapy salons can be seen as an extension of, and addition to, beauty parlours and aesthetic salons.

Figure 7.1 Covers of *Trinity*

(from top to bottom and left to right: vol.6 ‘Become stronger and more beautiful from the soul’, vol. 12 ‘Holistic beauty’, vol. 18 ‘The study of women’s teeth’, vol. 26 ‘Become beautiful with the spiritual’, vol. 28 ‘Diets that make you happier’)

Aesthetic (*esute*) salons often served as the entrance point to spiritual therapy for many practitioners. Ms Sakura, before becoming the spiritual counsellor who claimed in the interview to be aided by three guardian spirits, started her spiritual professional path as an aromatherapist, following her first contact with that therapy at an aesthetic salon. Ms Sachikawa was a cosmetics consultant in Nagoya before turning to full time professional clairvoyant counselling, and Ms Hamata, as already mentioned in section



3.1, enrolled on a channelling course at the suggestion of her classmates at an aesthetician college she was attending in Osaka.

The Organisation for Small & Medium Enterprises and Regional Innovation Japan (SMRJ) estimates the current *esute* industry to be worth approximately ¥400 billion (£3,013 billion), with an approximate 10,000 salons nationwide<sup>128</sup>. As Laura Miller discusses, in her extensive study of beauty consumption in Japan, aesthetic salons often offer, in addition to the usual hair removal or facial care treatments, services such as Ayurveda or Astrology (custom-made care based on one's astrological sign) derived from existing treatments found in traditional East Asian and South Asian medicine and therapies such as aromatherapy, which are requested by clients who have first experienced them abroad (Miller, 2006, 41, 68). Consequently, there exist today spiritual therapy salons that are advertised as aesthetician salons, or promote spiritual therapies as beauty methods to attract clients.

Ms Kinoshita, for example, admitted that she usually introduces herself as an aromatherapist although her aromatherapy session figures at the bottom of her list of therapies, which include 'healing' and 'hypnotherapy'. 'For people whom I meet for the first time and for my eight year-old daughter, I am an *esute* masseuse' explained Ms Kinoshita, before adding: 'I also don't like calling it counselling session channelling, because it sounds suspicious; I call it *esute* counselling'. There are of course those spiritual therapists who rarely reveal their belief in their "spiritual" abilities to their patients, such as Ms Kawamura who owns a massage school, yet admitted in the interview that she teaches her students 'more than just bodywork'. Most often,

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<sup>128</sup> From SMRJ's website [www.smrj.go.jp/keiei/service/030627.html](http://www.smrj.go.jp/keiei/service/030627.html) (visited 19 July 2010).

therefore, aesthetic practices and arguments are used as both concealment for less mainstream therapies and also as business policy in order to attract female customers.

Ms Michiko was very clear about the attractiveness of spiritual therapies that combine fortune telling, colours and aroma oils: '*esute*-type techniques and particularly aromatherapy and aura-soma are excellent ways to get women to your salon and make them regular clients before introducing more "spiritual" techniques such as *reiki* or channelling'. Aura-soma, a therapy created by British channeller Vicky Wall in 1982, consists of a choice of 108 bottles (new ones are being introduced periodically) containing double-coloured aroma oils (see figure 7.2) of which the client is supposed to choose four per session. The practitioner will then "read" the message implied by the sequence of choice, the colours and the paragraph of explanatory text accompanying every bottle in order to advise the client on their issues, and preferably repeat the session on a regular basis to verify how the situation improves. The client is also asked to apply the aroma oils where (s)he experiences bodily pains, but also on other parts of the body instead or in addition to cosmetic creams.

Figure 7.2 Aura-soma bottles and bottle B107<sup>129</sup>.**Archangel Tzaphkiel**

B107 – Opalescent Turquoise/Deep Magenta

Born – 14th December 2009 at 11.00am

*The deeper aspects of the Divine Feminine. The watery aspects of the whole of Creation. Dwelling within Binah on the Tree of Life. Ruler of the order of the Angels called Aralin. Guardian of the Akashic Chronicles and their mysteries*

*The holding of an eternal ocean of compassion. The deeper aspect of intuition, the inner tuition of the heart. The overcoming of obstacles and the healing of strengths. An invitation to inner disarmament in order to reveal the True Gold*

*The death of what was and the purification of Myrrh. A love that asks us not to “get out of the Way,” but to become the Way. A glimpse, and a call, from deeper realities and dimensions*

*An expansion of personal individuation into the collective. Through this bottle She comes to protect the light workers in the temples of their bodies*

Mr Ushimoto has gone much further in his quest to increase his clientele. Looking at his website for the first time (see figure 7.3), I could have never imagined that it was

<sup>129</sup> From the official websites [www.aura-some.net](http://www.aura-some.net), [www.aura-soma.ca](http://www.aura-soma.ca) and [www.aura-soma.gr](http://www.aura-soma.gr) (visited 19 July 2010).

owned by a 50-year old man, former civil servant and father of two boys, who arguably seemed to be investing a lot of time to satisfy his female clientele. ‘Almost all my clients are women, so my website is appropriately built to appeal to them’, explained Mr Ushimoto. It is also worth noting that, among Mr Ushimoto’s original sessions (i.e. those that are not owned by RMMS), we can find ‘Venus rose healing’, ‘Aphrodite beauty ray healing’ and ‘lily healing for a beautiful skin’. Mr Ushimoto, himself, gives as a reason for this “female” aspect of his practice, the fact that his guardian deity and channelling entity is the Goddess Aphrodite.

Figure 7.3 Mr Ushimoto’s website



あなたの人生を切り開き、健康でポジティブなライフスタイルを手に行けるよう、多彩なヒーリング&セラピーを行っています。(A-)☆

「ヴィーナスウォーター」と「ビューティースリット」  
大好評発売中!  
「ユリウォーター」と「クレオパトラウォーター」も発売しています。

☆アフロディーテのオリジナル CD3 傑作を発売中! ☆  
●Love&Beauty  
～金星の美の庭園をイメージした爽やかなハーモニー  
●Night Aphrodite  
～女性の心を癒すメロディーは瞑想などに最適!  
●Rose of Aphrodite  
～バラの美しさをイメージした落ち着いたメロディーはリラクゼーションに!  
各¥2,500です。ご希望の方はメールで注文して下さい。

イベント&セミナー情報

開催日時 ※受付中!	内容
7月①25-26 変更	●アデプトプログラム(2日間)
8月①9-10②16-17 12:00～18:00 他日相談可	●エジプシャンマジックマンスリーリチュアル 開催(場所;代々木MMS)私も参加します。
7月23日(金)18:30	●光のパーティーwithアフロディーテ 7月のテーマは「???」まだ未定です。
7月28日(水)19:00～	●瞑想会&交流会 初めての方も、気軽に参加ください!
8月11日(水)19:00～	●ギフトオブスピリット チャネリングの基礎。ハイアーセルフとの回路を作ります。
7月20日(火)10:00～17:00	●アダムカドモンプラスのスケジュール(7月8月)
アセンション(2012年)に備えて、心身の進化成長のために、とても重要なプログラムです!	

The combination of spiritual therapies with mainstream aesthetic care is neither new nor uniquely Japanese. Just looking at the empire that Oprah Winfrey has built on what has been called ‘a whole new aesthetic prison’ (Lofton, 2006, 614) suggests to us that Japan has joined the U.S.A. in reframing a message of personal liberation as

equivalent to individual bodily narcissism (Miller, 2006, 39). What is particularly interesting, however, is how spiritual therapists in the post-Aum era, in their reaction to the media's inability in its coverage of religious groups to include 'elements which might blur the simple narrative of victimizers and victims' (Gardner, 2001, 156), use beauty consumption to distance themselves from the "suspicious"/religious image of their practice. On the other hand, they join another media-created "religion": medical consumerism (see also chapter 5).

Starting from the 1980s when school refusal received increased media attention (Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999, 203) resulting in the construction of a "school refusal syndrome" (see footnote 103) which is still reported today by many spiritual therapists, the 1990s saw a "medicalisation boom" in Japan which is reflected in the personal stories of practitioners and the issues of their clients. This medicalisation seems to have worked on two levels: as a reason for spiritual therapists to reject mainstream medical care and as a tool of spiritual therapy itself. Next to *hikikomori* (social withdrawal) or the eating disorders, which appeared in the media in the 1990s and which Amy Borovoy has identified as medicalisations of citizens' reactions to 'a Japanese commitment to social harmony' (2008, 554; Pike and Borovoy, 2004), the "(re-)discovery" of depression remains the illustration *par excellence* of the above argument.

For Ms Miwa, as for another 12 of my informants, it was 'depression' that led them to try out and eventually embrace the healing effects of spiritual therapies. 'Back then (in the early 1990s), no one knew about depression', explained Ms Miwa, 'so even I did not know I had it'. Ms Shibata further clarified this change when I asked her if she had seen a difference in her clients' cases between now and a decade earlier when she started learning spiritual therapies. 'Depression. Most of the people that come now are

just depressed.’ Mr Matsuyama and Ms Natto, whose careers span over 30 years, made the same observations, claiming that the majority of recent cases were linked to depression.

As Margaret Lock has noted, it was only from the 1990s that the Japanese public began to medicalise the feelings of “feeling down” and “being gloomy”, which previously were thought of as simply part of everyday life (Lock and Nguyen, 2010, 74). One consequence of this increased number of “depressed” individuals is that now a few therapists, such as Ms Takashima, who attempted to take her own life on three occasions when she was in her early twenties, feel they have become specialists in the treatment of depression. They usually explain this “involuntary” specialization by the fact that their personal experience has contributed to their deeper understanding of such cases. When I interviewed Ms Takashima in early July 2009, she was already booked until mid-September, a rare case in the spiritual business. But Ms Fukuyama who made similar comments regarding the increase of depression cases, criticised, practitioners like Ms Takashima for believing that they know something because they have been through it, even though they might themselves be still in a state of recovery.

It is well known that depression, as with all somatized behaviours (including school refusal or *hikikomori*) resulting from a combination of historical, social and political variables, is poorly managed by biomedicine (ibid, 78). Yet, antidepressants eventually reached the Japanese shores in 2001 and Prozac was presented as a drug that changes personality in accordance with the American-type competitive lifestyle (Kirmayer, 2004, 169). And in this respect we find the same arguments discussed in section 6.3 regarding Americanism. For example, Ms Kawasaki expressed her criticism of Japanese society as follows: ‘in Japan, if you say you are depressed, it means you are

lazy. Japanese do not pay attention to problems of the heart (*kokoro no mondai*) until they fall apart'. We can conclude therefore that the popularisation of spiritual therapies can be conceived as both a reaction to the failure of medicalizing social issues (Ms Kawasaki turned to hypnotherapy due to the severe side effects of the drugs prescribed to her) and as an extension of the medicalisation trend beyond the body to include "the spiritual". Indeed, in the same way that a "spiritual beauty culture" has been linked in the salons to messages of personal liberation, spiritual therapies, like Prozac, could also have been conceived as a necessary weapon against the vicissitudes of an increasingly competitive Japanese society.

The simultaneous relation of spiritual therapy to beauty and therapy culture also implies a connection with a larger media-fuelled social phenomenon in Japan: self-searching (*jibun sagashi*). In his in-depth study of *jibun sagashi*, Hayamizu Kenrō, cites a long list of businesses living off the behaviour of Japanese youth who in the past 15 years seem to be convinced that, besides their present selves, there is another, real self they should attempt to find through actions that go against traditional social norms. In this counter-cultural phenomenon, Hayamizu distinguishes two types of individuals (2008, 4).

The first type corresponds to those who travel alone abroad or within Japan and who believe that, through the hardships they will experience by having to work to pay for their trip or commit themselves to particular non-profit organisations, they will find their real selves. Examples of this can be found in the success of the 1996-1997 television programme which recounted the adventures of a couple of comedians who hitchhiked from Hong Kong to London (*ibid*, 97-100) or in the 20,000 Japanese who have been emigrating to Okinawa every year since 2006 (*ibid*, 141). Judging from their

frequent trips to foreign countries, many spiritual therapists belong to this group (see next section) and continue to consider their “escapes”, as Ms Isomura has called it, as an opportunity to revive themselves. Others, like Ms Miwa, Ms Azumi or more recently, Ms Kikuko, have moved their salon to Okinawa to profit, in the words of Ms Azumi, from the location’s ‘sacredness’.

The second type, which frequently overlaps with the first, is composed of those who focus on finding what they want to do in life, and read self-development books and participate in empowerment seminars that they usually finance with a part-time job. These, as Hayamizu rightly points out, are the fans and followers of fortune-telling and every kind of spiritual therapy. They are the targets of, for example, *izakaya* (Japanese-style pub chains), like *Watami*, which seek out and exploit this cheap and easily laid off work force (ibid., 168), and of dubious publishing houses whose earnings come from the dreams of aspiring writers who in turn end up paying all the publication costs (ibid, 164), and of magazines, such as *BE-PAL*, which beautify the *jibun sagashi* mentalities through suggestions of perfect travel plans for young singles (ibid, 147). Links with the spiritual business are evident here, considering the shared characteristics of the Human Potential Movement and the New Age (see section 1.3). The following example illustrates this.

When I met Mr Kenji at a family restaurant near the headquarters of Rocky Mountain Mystery School in Tokyo, he seemed particularly interested in my experience of reading for a PhD at a British university. The reason, I later understood, was that Mr Kenji was himself a doctoral student at Waseda University (one of the most prestigious universities in Japan). Yet, as he explained, he felt that he had not found what he really wanted to do and had therefore started attending the self-development seminars of Funai



Yukio. He then moved to meditation practices such as the isolation tanks of Ecco Project<sup>130</sup> before being initiated into RMMS's adept programme. When I later met Mr Kenji at the 'Sacred Planet' event (see section 5.4) he looked bored and out of place; this impression was later confirmed in that his website has not been updated since May 2009 (checked July 2010).

The relation of the spiritual therapy phenomenon with other social trends of the last two decades leads us to consider a deeper association with the economic, social and cultural upheavals experienced by the Japanese at the turn of the twenty-first century. I propose to look at these in order of precedence, starting with the significance of a generational aspect in the spiritual business.

## **7.2. Generations of spiritual therapists**

On 2 October 2009, on Nihon TV's six o'clock news, following the announcement by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare that the jobs-to-applicants ratio has remained at 0.42 for the third consecutive month, its lowest level in history, a final year undergraduate student was heard saying: 'I have in the past year applied to more than a hundred companies and I have yet to receive a single offer (*naitai*). I have been looking for a job for so long I have forgotten what I really want to do in my life'.

It is no secret that job opportunities and job stability in Japan have decreased dramatically to a record minimum, particularly since the 2008 global financial crisis. Recent statistics show, for example, that the unemployment rate rose to an all-time high

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130 [www.eccoproject.com](http://www.eccoproject.com)

of 5.7 percent in July 2009<sup>131</sup>, while the number of NEETs (people not involved in employment, education, or training) among those aged between 25 and 34 has risen by 30,000 since 2002, reaching a total of 640,000 for those under 30 years old<sup>132</sup>. With the increase in the number of elderly shoplifters<sup>133</sup> and the number of those who committed suicide in 2009 having reached 32,845<sup>134</sup>, the Japanese seem to be finding it very hard to adjust to the socio-economic changes experienced around the world during the past decade.

In his critical study of the spiritual business, Sakurai issues a warning against the ‘spiritual services’ and notes that ‘the easy targets are the young, those with life worries, those tired of competition and those needing assistance from someone’ (2009b, 10). Hence someone like the student mentioned above would be a perfect client and, indeed, as mentioned in section 3.2, my interviews with professionals in the spiritual business reveal that the plea that ‘I don’t know what to do with my life’ is an issue they are hearing on a daily basis. Yet, Sakurai’s basic assumptions regarding the “wrongs” of the spiritual business reveal other, “positive” links between the last generation of followers of “the spiritual” and the popularisation of spiritual therapy. In graphs 3.1 and 3.2, I have already commented that when comparing the dates between the commencement of training and the opening of the salon for every spiritual therapist, it becomes clear that the later the therapist started training, the earlier (s)he tends to open a salon and the more types of sessions (s)he is likely to offer. This situation echoes Yumiyama’s claim

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<sup>131</sup> *The Japan Times*, 8 September 2009.

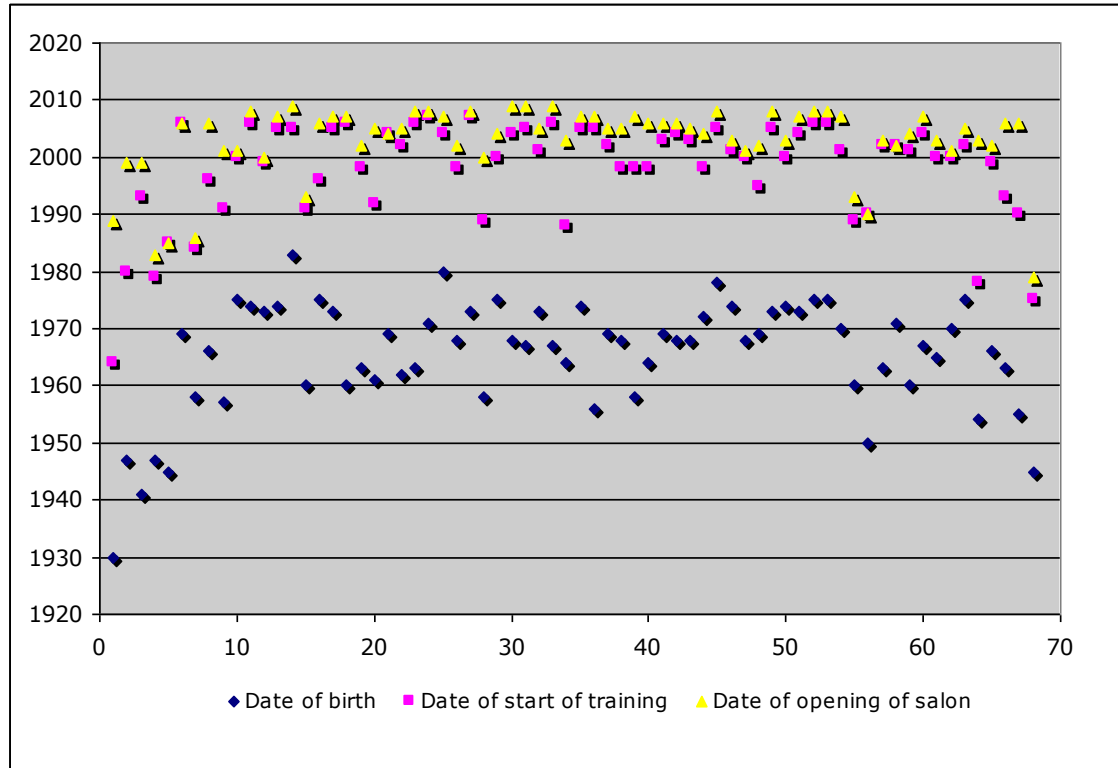
<sup>132</sup> *The Japan Times*, 4 July 2009.

<sup>133</sup> *The Japan Times*, 16 August 2009.

<sup>134</sup> *The Japan Times*, 10 June 2010.

that there is more than one generation of individuals (hence also practitioners) involved in “the spiritual” in Japan, and it is clearly depicted in another version of graph 3.1 (see Graph 7.1 below) to which the date of birth of the therapist has been added.

Graph 7.1 Three dates in the lives of spiritual therapists



From the graph there is an important observation which informs the argument developed in this section: approximately one-third of the therapists belong to what has been popularly called the ‘lost generation’, a term referring to the generation of university graduates hit by the ‘employment ice age’ of the decade from 1994-2004, and the group from which the majority of NEETs and freeters (people subsisting on part-time or certain types of contract work) appeared (*AsahiShinbun*, 2007, 17-19). Slightly less than a third of the informants are part of the ‘bubble generation’ (born 1965-1970), those who ‘after enjoying a carefree student life full of overseas trips and disco nights easily secured promises of jobs from big companies, as well as from the

central and local governments' (Arima, 2009). The rest were born earlier, between 1945 and 1965 (Japan's baby boom generation), with one exception: one was born in 1983.

Inspired by Yumiyama's suggestion, but looking at the spiritual business specifically, I argue therefore that, from a socio-economic perspective, the providers of spiritual services in Japan today, regardless of their age<sup>135</sup>, can be divided broadly into three generations corresponding to the three stages of development of this business sector: the originators of the movement who also built the foundations of the spiritual business, the consumers of the movement who used the spiritual training courses and seminars from the late 1990s onwards, and the new generation of spiritual therapists for whom the spiritual business is yet another career choice.

The first generation is exemplified by Ms Fukuyama who admitted that for the decade up to 1993, the year she quit her job as a secretary at the Japanese branch of a foreign computer logistics company, she was receiving in total for every year a 12-month bonus on top of her monthly salary: 'It was crazy! I visited more than 50 foreign countries and went to a multitude of healing and self-development seminars in the U.S. and around the world. At some point I was told by my friends that I should really do something with all this learning, so I quit my job and opened a hypnotherapy and counselling salon'. Today, Ms Fukuyama, while still practising her profession and inviting new spiritual faces to Japan in cooperation with local Japanese agencies, is also an interpreter for Eric Pearl and one of the seven Japanese who have reached the master level (level 4) of Pearl's re-connective healing.

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<sup>135</sup> I use the term "generation" here in its broader meaning of 'a group of individuals belonging to the same category at the same time' (from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/generation>, visited 10 July 2010).

Ms Yamada used to work as a systems engineer before she became a 'lightbody worker' in 1992 and started providing healing sessions.

In my twenties I was working almost 20 hours a day, but I had a lot of money. Really, a lot of money. And then just as I was starting to consider a career change, my boyfriend passed away. Convinced that the soul cannot just disappear into nothingness, I started reading Rudolf Steiner, Bashar, and Shirley MacLaine. But I knew that at the time, no one in Japan would understand these things, so I decided to go to America and went on an 18-day spiritual tour to Peru, which was organised by Voice and guided by an American channeller, Ed Mabe.

In Peru, and then later during other trips to the U.S.A., Egypt, and the Yucatan, Ms Yamada started having visions and eventually she saw energy coming out of her hands and found herself healing people whom she touched. She then decided to quit her job and live on her savings until she established a regular clientele. Until October 2008 she was also a regular participant at the *supicon*.

What transpires from the above is that the extraordinary material wealth experienced by the young workers of the bubble economy in Japan paid for their quest for alternative lifestyles and techniques of self-healing, and financially supported the firm establishment of the New Age movement in Japan in the 1990s. In fact, one could argue that, without such material wealth, Western New Age concepts and techniques popular in the spiritual business today would have taken much longer to reach Japanese shores. From the burst of the bubble in 1991, however, when Japan faced its first serious post-war economic crisis, during what in economic terms has been called the 'lost fifteen years' (Miura, 2008), many of the fans of "the spiritual" lost their jobs and for some of the new generation of troubled youth, spiritual healing started to mean more than just a spare-time activity.

The example of Ms Nishimura is illustrative of this second generation of spiritual

therapists. Ms Nishimura, after graduating with a law degree, found a job as a secretary, but stress and problems with colleagues at her workplace soon led her to hospital with depression. In 1995, forced to take a month off for health reasons, she soon realized that her company had fired her due to downsizing. This event drove her to start learning seriously about the crystals she used to collect as a hobby, and while working as a contract employee at a computer graphics company, she was spending all her extra money on courses on meditation and self-healing, partly for self-therapy and partly because she was thinking of becoming a professional therapist. In 2005 she quit her contract job and enrolled in crystal healing courses in Tokyo and Hawaii before she opened her own business in 2007.

Mary C. Brinton, using the concept of *ba* (場, organisational setting), suggests that, during the years of rapid economic growth (1960s-1980s), a certain life path defined by the smooth transfer from one *ba* (for example, the school) to another (for example, the company or married life) became the norm and the common sense pathway to adulthood in Japan. Yet the 1990s economic downturn, which announced the advent of post-industrialization and corporate restructuring, brought to an end the period in which everyone belonged to a *ba* (2008, 23-24). The new generation found itself disoriented, devoid of a *ba* and the subject of criticism from previous generations who saw in their children only a lack of will (as earlier expressed by Miura Atsushi).

The result was the increasing demand for spiritual services and the establishment of the first “spiritual academies” in Japan providing a full curriculum of therapy techniques (see section 4.1). Ms Nakada was one of the first students of Levanah Shell Bdolak, the American clairvoyant who founded ClearSight Japan.

Back in 1999, I had already been working at a pharmaceutical company

for almost 20 years, and I started thinking that drugs just could not solve everything. So, after I attended a few workshops on *reiki* and massage, I was introduced to Levanah's school. At the time, very few students were accepted onto the course. Levanah in fact used to select us by looking at our pictures and I really felt lucky when I was told I could join in.

It appears, therefore, that those of the first generation started opening businesses because they realized that their hobbies had increasingly become valid as a profession which was very much in demand, and the new generation then became exposed to more and more therapies either at events such as *supicon* or at private salons.

Ms Katō never managed to get a stable job. After switching from company to company, she eventually returned to her hometown where she worked as a secretary at a small factory, which she interpreted as having failed in life. Originally a fan of *feng shui*, in 2002 she picked up a book on macrobiotics and, intrigued by its content, she enrolled on several seminars organised at Voice. From there, she learned of aura-soma. Thinking that the concept resembled *feng shui*, she registered on an aura-soma course at the newly popular Diva Light academy. A fellow student at the academy suggested that she use the aroma oils of the *Young Living* brand, and when she applied them, she discovered them to be very effective. Ms Katō decided then to learn more about aroma oils and aura reading, and in 2006 entered the Japanese branch of the U.S.-based Dolphin Star Temple Mystery School founded in Tokyo (under the corporate umbrella of the previously mentioned Dynavision group) by its originator, the channeller Amora Quan Yin. In the meantime, Ms Katō also reached the third level of *reiki* master at the *reiki* school Palette and was initiated in 2005 to Eric Pearl's re-connective healing by the partner of Amora Quan Yin. In December 2007 Ms Katō, after completing the Dolphin Star Temple curriculum and also graduating from a two-year university correspondence course on psychology, quit her

job and opened her own salon, which she is now running while attending a three-year course at the newly-established Japanese branch of the Barbara Brennan School of Healing. One-off seminars on, for example, numerology, homeopathy, crystal healing, or hypnotherapy are not included in this short description of Ms Katō's impressive curriculum vitae.

This infatuation with “healing” served to revitalize older styles of practice and forced more traditional and older practitioners to adapt to the new norms of the spiritual business. The *yuta*, Ms Murakami, whom I met on Amami Island, confessed to having only started receiving clients on a regular basis in 2006. Until then she had been participating in local festivals and rituals embedded within the island's cultural framework, but the “spiritual boom” brought to her doorstep all kinds of requests to conduct individual sessions, particularly by female tourists wishing to experience the “old” techniques and compare them to what they had learned from seminars they attended in Osaka and Tokyo.

The demographic use of the “healing boom”-based *lingua franca* has undoubtedly increased beyond the circle of followers and enthusiasts and has invaded the public and corporate space as observed both in the West (Aldred, 2002, 65) and in Japan (Shimazono, 2007b, 9). This suggests that a new, third generation of university graduates grew up in this environment, and, as I propose here, for them the spiritual business may consist today of a career path chosen much earlier than the previous generations over other “regular” professions. Before I introduce a case to support my argument, it is necessary to mention that for some of my informants, the recent economic downturn has been the reason for the fact that their clientele has increased rapidly in the past few months: ‘Lately I have been obliged to limit the number of clients to two per day. Everyone is having job issues and I am seriously thinking of trying to get an industrial counsellor licence’. These were the



words of Ms Suzuki, formerly a business consultant and systems engineer, who has been offering sessions as a *reinōsha* since 2004.

Ms Hirayama, aged 27 and the youngest of my interviewees, quit her job as a public servant in March 2009 to become a full-time therapist. She became interested in spiritual healing five years ago when she saw Ehara's television show, and since then she has been trying to find a balance between her parents' wish for her to find a stable job and her dream of combining her love for art and therapy. Two years ago a friend introduced her to the Rocky Mountain Mystery School (RMMS) and, finding this business to be profitable, she decided to quit one of the few sectors in Japan that still guarantees lifelong employment. Arguably, there is still little evidence that the above case is representative of a new generation, but the continuing economic crisis in Japan combined with the mainstreaming of the *lingua franca* of the new spirituality may very well lead some of the less fortunate individuals, in employability terms, to seek a career in the spiritual business. This of course leads me to a discussion on the gender aspect of this phenomenon (see section 7.3).

Nevertheless, in terms of a preliminary conclusion, I argue that until now a certain pattern of development has become clear. Following George Bataille's theory of general economics, I propose that the 'unproductive and ecstatic' (Goux, Ascheim and Garelick, 1990) consumption permitted by the unprecedented excess of economic wealth experienced by Japanese society in the 1980s was aimed at consumers discovering the ultimate meaning of existence, using the newly popularized "spiritual" tools recommended for its attainment. This sudden surge of capital subsequently supported the foundation of what could be called a "spiritual *ba*" (to adapt Brinton's concept), a new organisational setting in which subsequent generations of Japanese, alienated by the

post-bubble invalidation of their promised and normal life paths, found an opportunity firstly in their socialization into the spiritual business, and then for many of my informants, a means to earn a living.

### **7.3. The counter-social aspect of spiritual therapy: a gender perspective**

The employment opportunities offered by the spiritual business become even more relevant if we look at the gender aspect of the spiritual therapy phenomenon. Indeed, it is no secret that the New Agers share many convictions with other social movements that appeared in the early 1970s: the peace movement, environmentalism and, more importantly for my analysis, feminism. Particularly close bonds are found with branches of feminism, such as the feminist spirituality movement which claims that it is ‘by the acknowledged re-emergence of the feminine principle into the universe that the New Age vision of a planetary culture can come about’ (Bednarowski, 1992, 174). Tanaka Mitsu, the leader of *ûman libu* (women’s liberation), Japan’s radical feminist movement, left Japan in 1975 for Mexico, and on her return four years later, proclaimed that she had been enlightened with the truth that ‘people are bodies’ (*hito wa karada da*)<sup>136</sup>. Subsequently she studied acupuncture and moxibustion and opened a therapy salon in 1982. Today she shares her time between teaching image training and using needles, beams of light and *qiqong* to heal the hormonal and nervous imbalances of her patients<sup>137</sup>.

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<sup>136</sup> From Tanaka Mitsu’s website: <http://www.tanakamitsu.com/> (visited 14 July 2010).

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*

Following the observations in section 7.1 regarding the popularisation of spiritual therapy and Japanese women's consumerism and informed by the previous section's socio-economically based discussion on the generational dimension of spiritual therapists, I hereafter focus on the most counter-social aspect of the phenomenon under study: spiritual therapy as an expression of gender discrimination in Japanese society.

From the very first studies of shamanistic practices, the reason for the continuous prevalence of women among both practitioners and clients has tended to be attributed to gender-based physiological differences. Basil H. Chamberlain, who observed cases of fox-possession in nineteenth century Japan, concluded that the exclusively female onset of possession was due to a weak intellect, a superstitious turn of mind and debilitating diseases (2000[1890], 88). Czaplicka, in her classic account of shamanism in Siberia, argued that 'women are by nature more disposed to shamanizing than men due to the fact that they are more prone to emotional excitement than men' (1914, 198). This psycho-physiological distinction between the two sexes was the most common explanation for the lack of popularity of spiritual therapies among Japanese men. Ms Namihira's words form a representative example of the claim mostly heard in my interviews: 'women like trying new things and generally have an open mind, but men are always very suspicious and don't like meeting us face-to-face.'

Although rarely taken further, on a very few occasions, such explanations continued in a more self-reflexive, but still physiologically informed tone. Ms Kawasaki, for example, considered that women are burdened with a more physically and emotionally stressful life and referred particularly to issues regarding marriage, childbirth, children's education and emancipation. In this respect, Mr Kobama, like other practitioners, explained the age span of his clients in relation to a period of change

(*tenkai*) in Japanese women's lives: 'except of course for the fact that the thirties is the decade when for the professionally active individual, the body starts showing signs of tiredness in response to workload, for women, especially, it is the decade when most try to either bear or bring up a child.' Mr Kobama's opinion interestingly reflects the frequent connection between cases of transcendental experiences and the social pressures brought upon these women because of their reproductive role. A classic case is that of Northern Sudanese women who, in the first two years after marriage, were found to be in danger of spirit (*zar*) possession, when they had failed to ensure successful procreation (Boddy, 1988, 9).

It is clear, therefore, that it is the socially constructed expectations regarding womanhood that are expressed in the "natural" gender gap observed by spiritual therapists. The majority of practitioners fail of course to realize this significance and, aside from the above arguments, tend also to emphasize a second argument: the cultural roots of the phenomenon.

From the belief in Amaterasu as the most revered Shinto goddess, to the characteristic female majority of traditional shamanistic practitioners and founders of new religions, spiritual therapists often repeat what popularly written books (for example, Inoue [2009, 120-121]) consider to stem from the matrilineal origins of Japanese society (Henshall, 1999, 8; Kumagai, 1996, 94). Here, yet again, Japan is characterised as a unique, historically homogeneous culture in which women have "traditionally" played magico-religious roles. Besides the nationalistic connotations in such reasons proffered by spiritual therapists (see section 6.3), the historic continuity argument ignores the double image that usually accompanies the belief in "a spiritually empowered feminine" in Japanese folk religion. Indeed, research has shown that the

introduction of Buddhism in the seventh century A.D., strengthened the existing beliefs that a woman's innate spiritual powers can also bring about ill fortune depending on the context (Yoshida, 1990, 73) and has led to the exclusion of "polluted" women from the domain of institutional religion (Kawahashi, 2006). Consequently female shamans, though often persecuted and linked to a cult of evil (Kawamura, 2006, 21), rose 'to fulfil the needs of a population dissatisfied with the services by government-approved, hegemonic religious institutions' (Groemer, 2007, 45).

Before I introduce a relevant case, it is worth noting that similar theories have been advanced in relation to the nineteenth century Western spiritualist movement, which was found to be driven by 'women in a time when their sex had very slim opportunities to exercise spiritual leadership in most established denominations' (Ellwood, 1992, 61).

The case of Ms Itakagi is illustrative of the validity of the above in today's setting. Following a sequence of events that is often reported in the biographies of shamanistic practitioners (and of many spiritual therapists adhering to pattern 1 identified in section 3.1)<sup>138</sup>, Ms Itakagaki, after an initial period of being constantly under stress due to the combination of a job she disliked (as a high-school teacher) and a private life she had to share with her parents-in-law (with whom she co-habited), ended up, at the age of 30, depressed and confined to bed for three months. A revelatory dream in which a *yamabushi* (mountain ascetic) warned her of a bleak future if she did not accept her fate led her eventually to seek the advice of a famous healer in Yokohama who helped

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<sup>138</sup> This sequence is as follows: 1) a condition of crisis, 2) contact with religious groups or shamans in order to overcome the problem, 3) belief and ascetic practice, 4) possession by a deity, 5) the deepening of belief and ascetic practice, 6) acquisition of social organisation through demonstration of spiritual abilities as a shaman (Kawamura, 1999, 134).

awaken her healing powers and urged her to make use of them in business. However, further contact with *yuta* during a trip to Okinawa convinced Ms Itagaki to enrol in the Shinto Department of Kokugakuin University and to finish one of the two<sup>139</sup> formally recognised training courses to become a Shinto priestess. During those years of apprenticeship, Ms Itakagaki started offering therapy sessions on a voluntary basis in which she would seek solutions to her client's issues in the visions she had on hearing the their story<sup>140</sup>. When I met Ms Itagaki in June 2009, she had just graduated from Kokugakuin University and, after a two-month period of searching for a part-time priestess job, she was resigned to following the Yokohama healer's advice and had opened a website, and is now formally pursuing a career in the spiritual business. 'No shrine wanted to have a woman priestess' complained Ms Itagaki, almost excusing herself for joining the marginal group of spiritual therapists.

Although the above remains a rare case, it points to a far more significant remark that is related to the economic reasons for which the second generation of spiritual therapists chose their profession during Japan's financial crisis. It is the argument that (see section 1.3) the rampant gender inequality in the work sector and at home has greatly influenced the popularity of spiritual therapies. In fact, we need to recall Mr Takahashi's post (figure 3.8) where he explained that his housewife-clients had recently expressed the wish to become professional practitioners because they could neither rely

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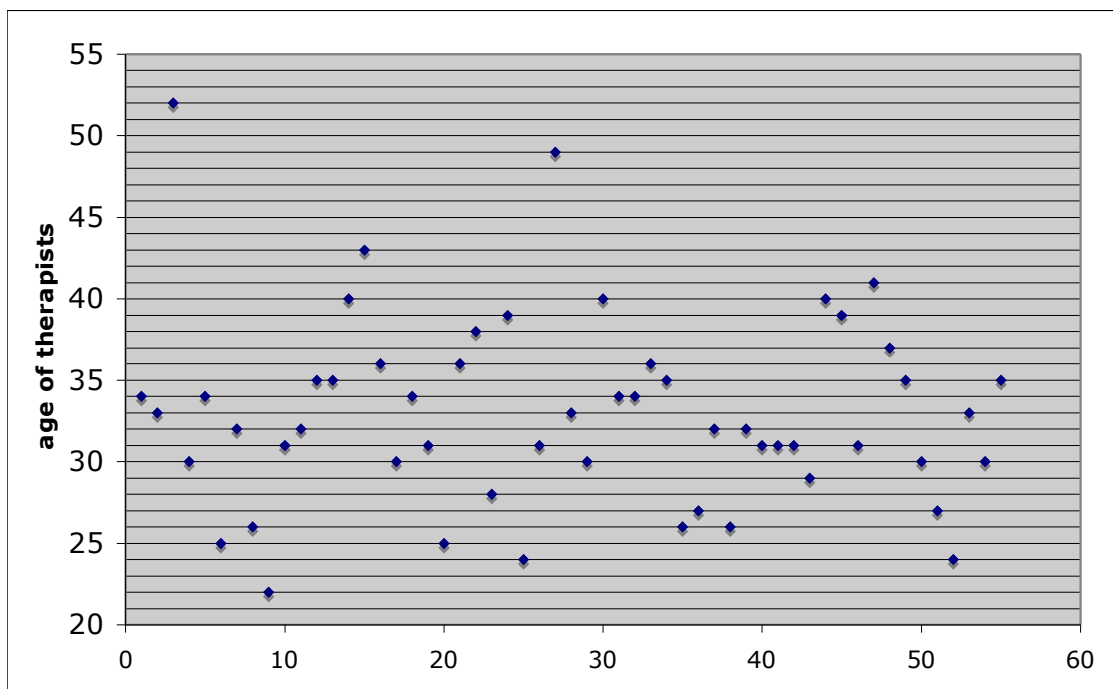
<sup>139</sup> The other institution is Kōgakkan University in Ise (Mie prefecture).

<sup>140</sup> Ms Itagaki often draws her visions in a small notebook that I was allowed to photograph. The day after the interview, however, I received an e-mail from Ms Itagaki asking me never to divulge these photos because they depict the guardian spirits of her clients, and are thus considered as private information.

on their husband's income alone nor go back at their age to full-time, stable employment.

Let us, therefore, recall the M-shaped curve of women's employment in Japan (see graph 1.1), and, in addition to the obvious correspondence that we can observe between the age span (late 20s to early 40s) of the clients and the middle of the curve, verify the hypothesis that most female practitioners started considering entering the path of professional spiritual therapy during that same, employment-deficient period of their lives (see graph 7.2)<sup>141</sup>.

Graph 7.2 Age of informants when they started learning spiritual therapies



According to the literature, this span, from 25 to 39 years old, when the female labour participation rate drops, and during which 46 of the 55 women-therapists seem to have started training in the spiritual business, includes, in fact, the four major life-changing

<sup>141</sup> I have to note that from the three individuals who started learning spiritual therapies relatively late in life (above 45 years old), two are men, and the last one is Ms Nishimura (see previous section).

stepping-stones in a Japanese woman's life: quitting employment, getting married, bearing a child and when the last child commences schooling (Sugimoto, 2003, 154). It is no wonder that both the reasons for becoming a therapist and, more importantly, the clients' issues reported in spiritual salons have to do with pressures related to these four life-cycle events.

In the 2009 report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Japan ranks 57<sup>th</sup> on the gender empowerment scale, behind Venezuela and Uganda (UNDP, 2009, 186). The following comment by *reiki* healer, Ms Reiko was one of the few that clearly expressed the dissatisfaction with this gender discrimination in the Japanese work place. 'You graduate university, you get an O.L. (office lady) job, they make you quit at 26 years old because you marry, then you have kids and that's it. No opportunities for skilling-up, no equality for women'. This criticism of Japanese society stemmed from Ms Reiko's personal ordeal in trying to keep a job while being married; she eventually gave up after her supervisor at her third workplace convinced her that it was better to open a therapy salon.

Hypnotherapist, Ms Iwato, testified to even more serious issues: after being subjected to sexual harassment for three years, she ultimately quit a job she really liked and "fled" to Hawaii where she trained in various spiritual therapies for three months before returning to Tokyo to open her own salon. A 1997 survey conducted by the Japanese government showed, in fact, that more than half of Japanese women had been recipients of unwelcome verbal and physical actions in the workplace (Rebick, 2006, 84). Unfortunately, for many Japanese women, harassment also continues at home. A Cabinet Office survey conducted in October and November 2008 among 3,125 adult women revealed that 13.6 per cent had experienced violence from their boyfriends when



they were in their teens to twenties, and a staggering 33.2 per cent of married participants had been victims of physical and mental abuse from their husbands<sup>142</sup>.

This high percentage of domestic violence (DV) was evident in the client-cases reported by my informants. Two of the 20 attendants of Ms Minami's event that was mentioned in section 2.3, reported that DV was the cause of their original visit to the *reinōsha*. Domestic issues were also daily matters for metaphysiotherapist, Ms Kimura. 'I remember a particularly serious case of a woman who had been coming for therapy for two years', explained Ms Kimura. 'She had serious issues with her husband. He was very strict, violent and he was telling their children to stop listening to their mother. She also had to deal with her husband's older sister who lived with them and kept ordering her around her own house. It took a long time before I managed to teach her to say "no" to her husband. She eventually divorced and took the children with her. He came back begging, but she did not change her mind'.

Faced, therefore, with challenges both at work and at home, and on top of the economic stagnation which further pushed women to the decision to marry, Japanese female clients were unanimously said by spiritual therapists to worry most frequently about finding the "right partner". Of course, although this is often subject not only to the influence of the media (see section 7.1), but also conflicting identities (see next section), we cannot ignore the social pressure-factor. Ms Ōtani had been occasionally seeing spiritual advisor Mr Suzuki for the last six months. A successful career woman, she felt that at her age (35 years old), she wanted to marry but did not wish to stop working nor lose her carefree life with travel abroad and dinners at expensive restaurants that her salary level enabled. She was worried about entering the highly gendered role of a

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<sup>142</sup> *The Japan Times*, 25 March 2009.

Japanese wife that her parents wished for. In fact, most women spiritual therapists (36 of the 55) were single at the time of the interview. Eight of them had divorced because, as noted in section 6.3, they could not freely pursue their spiritual therapy interests which often required them, for example, to travel to attend seminars in Japan and abroad. Both singles and divorcees felt that a man should not only respect his wife's interests, but also support her in developing them, an opinion that contrasts with the usual attitude of Japanese men who expect their wives to stay at home to take care of children (Nagase, 2006, 51).

'He is wonderful', answered Ms Kawasaki when I asked about her husband's opinion on her hypnotherapy and fortune-telling practice. 'He does not share my interest in "the spiritual", but he is happy that during the day, while he is gone, I am busy with something I like, which helps people and also brings a second income to the family.' The same testimony was heard from Ms Iwakura, who had also turned one room in her house into her private salon and had successfully managed to raise two children, volunteer at the local community centre and run a spiritual therapy business for the past seven years. Although there are also a few rare cases of therapists, such as Ms Murayama, who have convinced their partners to quit a stressful job and adhere to a lifestyle of part-time work combined with the practice of therapy, female practitioners in general seemed to express through their lives and those of their clients a revolt against the social expectations and constraints that still burden women in Japan today.

This tone of opposition observed in the testimonies and practices of spiritual therapists reflects even more significant connections between the phenomenon under analysis and the changing sense of self and identity that has been observed in Japanese society since the early 1990s. The following and final section of this chapter will

attempt to highlight this socio-psychological aspect of the popularity of spiritual therapy.

#### **7.4. Spiritual therapy and the Japanese self**

The argument developed in the previous section is not of course new, but rather a confirmation that the theory, which stipulates that social deprivation leads to greater religiosity among women (Walter and Davie, 1998, 645), has not become outdated. Involvement in spiritual therapy can also be considered as a means of socialization, an observation that concerns women's participation in older forms of magico-religious practices too. Kawamura, for example, has noted that socialization was already apparent in the process by which blind women in pre-modern Japan were becoming mediums called *itako* (1994, 101). More recently, Helen Hardacre has confirmed that the large female membership of new religions in Japan finds in those groups 'an extremely satisfying avenue of prestige and an outlet of talent and energy' (1986, 193). Hashisako Mizuho, who conducted participant observation of several *supicon* (see section 4.3), concluded that those who attended were there to have fun and preferably make friends (2008).

It can be argued therefore that spiritual therapists in general, in consuming and practising the services of the spiritual business expand their social capital, which allows them to withstand social constraints, as exemplified in the previous chapter<sup>143</sup>, and

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<sup>143</sup> For example, in personal conversations with cultural psychiatrist Shimoji Akitomo, it was made clear that Japanese women are more prone than men to use their social capital for support in cases of depression. This is demonstrated by the fact that women make up only 20 per cent of the suicide cases in Japan (see also Shimoji, 2008a).

personal issues, and also find ways to realize themselves. Ms Nakata is a very good example of this function of “the spiritual”. A very introvert child, Ms Nakata explained that, until the age of 16, she had had very few friends and was constantly made fun of because of her interest in all occult subjects. ‘Then, at 16, I decided to change. I tried to be like everyone else: I started doing sports, wearing make-up and after graduation I found a job in a cosmetics company’. Soon, Ms Nakata met her current husband, who, she felt, understood her and left her free to return to her original hobby of reading books of the *seishin sekai*. When, however, Ms Nakata realized that she could not have children, she turned her hobby into a part-time profession, surrounding herself with women experiencing the same issues as her. ‘Thanks to “the spiritual” I have come to terms with the reality that no matter how much I envy these kids running around our table (the interview took place on a Sunday afternoon in a coffee shop selling donuts), I will never be able to have one of my own.’

Like Ms Nakata, other spiritual therapists claimed that through their sessions with clients, they grow to find themselves and acquire a new identity that allows them to be reintegrated into society. And this socialization is directly linked with the fact that they help others. Indeed, as I have already emphasized, the majority of my informants usually launched into severe criticism of the mindless consumption of spiritual therapies. Seemingly, therefore, “the spiritual” as a hobby is meaningless unless it caters to the ultimate objective of using one’s achievement of self-development to assist others. Ms Nishiyama expressed this critique as follows.

A woman in her twenties came last week and asked me if she could record her session. I found it awkward, but I agreed and then I realized that she was one of these “fans”. She presented her life as entirely filled with problems; her workplace, her family, her boyfriend, her health, everything seemed to be against her. However, when I strove to give her practical advice, like suggesting she go jogging to lose some weight, she would

ignore me and always bring the conversation back to searching for the “spiritual” reasons for her suffering. The same day, a man in his thirties came with the same kind of behaviour. I just can’t deal with these people for whom “the spiritual” accounts for every moment of their life.

For Ms Nishiyama, therefore, these clients who have retreated into a “spiritual” world are ‘awkward’ (*hen*) and ‘dangerous’ (*abunai*). Like the *otaku*, *hikikomori* or the NEETs, they are blamed because they have lost their contact with society and joined a virtual world, in this case “the world of the spiritual”. Iida Yumiko argues that the second half of the 1990s, witnessed an ongoing intrusion of virtual goods and services in everyday Japanese life hinting at ‘the emergence of a form of pleasurable indulgence in a self-referential sign-economy, in which the players are motivated by a sense of nostalgia to “repossess” (...) the self in a virtual form, the real versions of which are beyond one’s ability to possess’ (2001, 229). Yumiyama Tatsuya identifies the reason for this feeling of emptiness and the subsequent search for the “real” self (exemplified by the *jibun sagashi* phenomenon) in the value relativism (*kachi sōtai shugi*) that appeared in the “bubble” society of the late 1980s and rapidly spread in the aftermath of the burst of the bubble economy (2004, 263). Some spiritual therapists seemed to be aware of that process.

When I asked Ms Kinoshita her opinion on why the majority of her clients are in their thirties, she replied that ‘it is because they were brought up in the 1980s to think that they are free to do anything they like and of course the media capitalised on those ideals by promoting the image of a person with an original lifestyle, and everyone now wants to be that “original” person’. However, Ms Chizuko suggested that ‘now not everyone has the financial capacity to do what they want, yet they keep comparing

themselves to these ideal model lives they see in their successful friends or watch on television programmes and they completely lose themselves’.

The spiritual therapy phenomenon can thus be conceived as a reaction to this liminality experienced by contemporary Japanese, a liminality, which includes the liminality of health-seeking (mentioned in chapter 5), and which has produced, to use Victor Turner’s concept, a *communitas*, ‘a modality of social relatedness’ (1973, 217). This community may correspond to a community of suffering, in the case of, for example, Ms Nakata or the women of the previous section, but it may be also more accurately called a ‘narrative community’, using the concept of Shimoji Akitomo (2008b, 128). This narrative community allows healing, in the sense of reconciliation with oneself through one’s private meaning of self (Araya et al., 1995, 5), and resocialization by contextualising this meaning of self in a collective field of signification (Lock and Nguyen, 2010, 294).

An example is necessary here to illustrate the above argument. To the same question I had asked Ms Kinoshita and Ms Chizuko, Ms Azumi replied by using a specifically New Age concept: ‘They are indigo children! They are the ones who started wondering about themselves and seeing new perspectives’. The term indigo children was coined by self-proclaimed psychic Nancy Ann Tappe<sup>144</sup>, who theorized that the 1970s and 1980s saw an increase in births of children whose aura has an indigo colour (blue-violet) signifying that they possess higher abilities of perception. The idea was popularized in New Age circles around the world with the publication in 1998 of *The*

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<sup>144</sup> [www.nancyannetape.com](http://www.nancyannetape.com) (visited 24 May 2010).

*Indigo Children: the New Kids Have Arrived*<sup>145</sup> and it has been an argument that my informants often relied upon to explain the common issues presented by their clients. As an interview with one of the authors of the popular book denotes<sup>146</sup>, the term has often been understood in the United States as an explanation for the increase in the 1980s of the onset of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Consequently, Sarah W. Whedon described this emergence of indigo children in sociological terms as ‘a restoration of the value of special children through a proactive inversion of meaning’ (2009, 61).

However, in Japan, the concept seems to have expanded to account for the generations (“lost” and “post-lost”) of Japanese who have been experiencing a crisis of identity since the 1990s and whose most fundamental problem, as argued by Kawanishi Yuko, is a deep-rooted phobia of human relations (2009, 133). Considering the strong relational quality of the Japanese self (Kondo, 1987, 245), it is logical that a crisis of identity translates into issues of forming human relationships. ‘Ultimately it is all about *taijin kankei* (relations with others)’, concluded Ms Sachikawa in our discussion about her clients. ‘Whether it is about their work place, their family, their boyfriend and even their health, it all comes down to difficulties of communicating one’s wishes to others’.

The socialization into a narrative community permitted by the engagement in spiritual therapy seems to work further than giving a meaning as to why one is lost by using concepts such as the “indigo children” and sharing one’s suffering. But this cannot explain entirely why so many people want to become professional practitioners

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<sup>145</sup> Natural Spirit published a Japanese translation of this book, written by Carroll Lee and Jan Tober, in July 2001.

<sup>146</sup> [http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Indigo\\_Children/id/6312](http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Indigo_Children/id/6312) (visited 22 July 2010).

(besides the obvious financial return). The reason for a growing spiritual business lies, I believe, in the benefits the Japanese therapists gain from forming a therapist-client relationship. By benefits, I mean the opportunity of self-expression that Paul Heelas has defended as the basis of the popularisation of inner-life spirituality (see section 4.5). In this regard we need to bear in mind Jane Bachnik's analysis of the Japanese self: 'the Japanese acknowledge that every instance of self-expression is possible only through someone else's self-restraint; that disciplining one's self for the greater good of the social "whole" does not destroy, but rather develops the self' (1994, 166).

At first instance, the above may sound as though I am arguing that the Japanese therapists need to form a power relationship to feel complete. This was, in fact, the opinion of Ms Fukuyama who has been practicing for nearly 20 years and commented on the new wave of practitioners in the following words: 'one day they are some housewife no one knows of and the next day they have queues of people asking for their advice. No wonder everyone wants to do that job'. Although this may be true for some people, there were some practitioners who seemed to find it exhilarating when they were given the chance to give their sincere opinion on their clients' issues and also pull out the "sincere self" (*hontō no jibun*) from their clients. This was only made possible by the affective belief of the client in the spiritual powers of the therapist, and would have never occurred in an everyday setting where the fear of offending the other, due to the value relativism in contemporary Japanese society, has scared off the clients from forming relationships.

Ms Kikuko was very clear about this sincerity and has adapted her practice according to the needs of Japanese clients today. 'In the past I used to just "read" their aura and tell them what I see. There was no real conversation. But, now I have realized



that managing to extract their *honne* (sincere feelings) is as effective as “reading” them’. In her session, Ms Kikuko uses the two main tools at her disposal, namely aura-reading and past-life reading, but eventually ‘it’s all about them, here and now’. And to reach her goal, she admitted to be constantly switching between restraining herself from telling the clients what they should think or do and expressing her disappointment in them ‘reacting, but not thinking (*kangaeru janakute, hannō suru*)’. Ms Kikuko’s session is therefore a clear opportunity for the client to form a relationship in which (s)he expresses him(her)self while in a position of restraint due to a lack of spiritual powers, and a chance for the therapist to do the same in the opposite balance of giving her opinion (see moral statements in section 5.3) without forcing her spiritual powers on the client. And, for the therapist, the session answers also to the ethical aspect of sharing her benefits with the rest of the world.

What I am arguing here is that spiritual therapy as it stands today in Japan, in “soiling the clean” (see Chapter 5), and in making the self its primary cause of problems, has been responding to the lack of opportunity of polishing the *kokoro* (the heart), and the lack of self-expression caused by the “loneliness” of Japanese people; seeking self-expression has therefore become a this-worldly-benefit sought by purchasing spiritual narratives from professional practitioners. Consequently, and as in the other “magical” methods of seeking this-worldly benefits in Japan, as described in Reader’s and Tanabe’s study, both the seller (the spiritual therapist) and the purchaser (the client) are bound by the morality enveloping this interweaving of materialism and spiritualism (1998, 118). This morality stipulates that the benefit of reaching a *sunao na kokoro* (a sincere heart) (Kondo, 1987, 261) during a spiritual therapy session has to ‘have as an ulterior and final goal the benefiting of the whole nation’ (Reader and

Tanabe, 1998, 125). Thus, we witness both a rise of spiritual therapists and a criticism against the “spiritual-*gokko*”.

### **7.5. Conclusion: spiritual therapy, yet another mirror of contemporary Japanese society.**

This chapter has not covered all the sociological facets of the spiritual therapy phenomenon. It has not, for example, considered the role of men in the spiritual business, in which they seem to specialize in energy-work (mostly massage-type techniques), nor the observation that the spiritual community sometimes serves as a matchmaking locus for the most fervent members (of both sexes) of the new spirituality culture. The reason lies of course in the lack of sufficient data that would allow me to develop detailed arguments. I have also not addressed Sakurai Yoshihide’s socio-economic claim that ‘visitors at the *supicon* are really neither bourgeois wives nor office ladies with a disposable income. As for the exhibitors, who seem to be involved in what really is a niche market, the vast majority of them are insignificant managers of businesses that will never hit the jackpot’ (2009a, 270). Sakurai’s observations are not supported by any empirical survey and thus cannot really be addressed, since every time it seemed that it was primarily bourgeois wives who were using spiritual therapies, there came another testimony of individuals who lacked the financial power and were thus saving money to go to the hypnotherapist. Similarly, next to the successful therapists there were those who had only one or two clients per week; but this could be interpreted as enjoying a hobby rather than taking advantage of a niche market.

What this chapter has attempted to demonstrate is that rather than a phenomenon which benefits from Japan’s social trends and issues, the popularisation of spiritual therapy can better be seen as an expression of the social trends and issues which have

characterised Japanese society since the early 1990s: as a mirror of consumer culture and the media-based commoditization of the body, the heart and the self; as an illustration of a different way of coping with the economic and employment crisis; as a reaction to gender discrimination; and as a reflection of the identity crisis to which many Japanese have succumbed today.

In this sense, spiritual therapy can be conceived as yet another ritualistic, (albeit temporary for some people) solution to social unrest. It is yet another proof that ‘Japanese civilization is continually inventing and adapting new forms of “primitive simplicities” (the authors’ ironic term for the techniques, rituals and objects that are utilized to acquire benefits) to deal with the vicissitudes of modern life’ (Reader and Tanabe, 1998, 117). It remains, therefore, in the following chapter to review my analysis of the phenomenon and attempt to extract theoretical concepts that may be utilised cross-culturally.

## Chapter 8: The Spiritual Business in Perspective

As I sat down to write this concluding chapter, I found myself wondering what Mr Suzuki, the spiritual advisor who was the main reason for my decision to focus my research on the spiritual therapists of Tokyo, might be doing today. As I have already mentioned (see section 6.4), according to the friend who had introduced me to him, Mr Suzuki had begun “losing his powers” and I would not be surprised if he has now stopped his activities as suddenly as he started offering sessions four years ago. Mr Suzuki seemed to be aware of the transitory nature of the spiritual business and had never chosen to do it full time. He had not invested time and money in any website, nor advertised his practice in any of the popular magazines, such as *Trinity*, or online inventories of “the spiritual”, such as *teddyangel.com*. He was relying entirely on word of mouth popularity and the willingness of his satisfied clients to pass on his mobile phone’s number to their friends, colleagues or family. When, at the end of our interview, I had asked Mr Suzuki what he planned to do in the future, he replied rather surprisingly that he wished to visit the country of his dreams, Egypt. In fact, it seemed that we coincidentally had something in common: during our adolescence we had been fascinated by the novels of Christian Jacq, the French Egyptologist who became famous worldwide for his *Ramsès* series of fictionalised history of Ancient Egyptian civilization.

And here lies the dilemma that I believe runs through this entire thesis: should Mr Suzuki be blamed for profiting from the Ehara-boom to practice professionally a hobby he testified to having been pursuing and enjoying from a very young age (‘I remember hearing the ghost of my grand-mother when I was six years old’) in order to finance a

trip to Egypt? Should he be the only one to blame, as Sakurai in his analysis of the spiritual business suggests, or should our criticism include all those other participants in the spiritual business, namely Mr Suzuki's clients, the publishers of books of "the spiritual", the owners of "spiritual academies", and the funders of television programmes such as the Fountain of Aura? I believe that my discussion has demonstrated that there is no clear answer to these questions, because there is no necessity and no one in particular to blame. Spiritual therapy is a business and a promotion of humanistic morality values; it is a psychologisation of human calamity and an appropriate opportunity to form meaningful relationships; it is a conservative/protectionist ideology fit for an insecure everyday life and a liberal, user-friendly "shopping therapy"; it is a media-launched fashion and an avenue for dealing with social pressures and identity crises. The following section summarizes these two facets of spiritual therapy in contemporary Japan, before a theorization of its features leads us to the elaboration of a model that represents the complexity of the phenomenon.

### **8.1. The two facets of spiritual therapy**

Arguably my simple research question, namely whether the spiritual business is just another money-making consumerist fashion or an expression of deeper changes in contemporary Japanese society, followed a simple sequence of investigative fields that were supposed to provide an answer to it. By simple, I mean the usual thoughts that one entertains in coming face to face with a popular activity in a different cultural setting.

On leaving Mr Suzuki's session, my first reaction was, indeed, to wonder how profitable this business was. And Chapter 4 demonstrated, that apart from a few large institutions organizing training classes with a high turnover of students which they need

to keep satisfied and thereby retain by constantly developing new types of activities, an independent spiritual therapist, like Ms Fumada or Mr Takahashi, needs to spend tremendous amounts of time and money on what is a very unstable business activity if they want to live off it. Expensive advertising and the rent of a salon, anonymous “bashing” on the worldwide web by dissatisfied clients or competitors, the constant appearance of new concepts and techniques to meet the needs of the market in the new spirituality culture, the necessity to keep up with internet technology; these are just the most immediately observable factors rendering the spiritual business either a short-term, possibly profitable investment, or merely an expensive hobby. And eventually there exists a certain self-imposed moral code regarding financial profits which seemed to reflect a moral humanism that Paul Heelas, one of the world authorities on the New Age Movement, argued as the positive aspect of these activities in that it focuses on developing ‘a spirituality of life’.

These moral statements, such as ‘if you try hard everything will work out’ or ‘be grateful to the people who surround you’, comprised a common feature among the different types of spiritual therapies discussed in Chapter 5. They were used to conclude every session of the most popular techniques, in this case hypnotherapy, spiritual counselling and energy-type sessions such as DNA activation, thus completing the narrative emplotment, which, by requiring the participation of the imaginative power of the client, may indeed give rise to positive effects. On an experiential level, however, I have presented the argument that these spiritual therapies also reinforce the liminality of the Japanese patient, who under the assumptions of a global, psychologising, CAM-influenced therapy culture, becomes the victim of the transfer of physiomorphism (the Japanese illness aetiology process) to the inside (*uchi*). The clients therefore fall

into the trap of endlessly searching for the spiritual therapy that will enable them to “know themselves” and “clean the *uchi*”. Consequently, despite the attractiveness of these spiritual therapies for the Japanese clients, who prefer the absence of both social obligations towards the therapist and verbal confrontation during the session, I conclude that, in addition to being on occasion simply dangerous for the patient, spiritual therapies merely consist of a warm and relaxing encounter with a person paid to listen and repeat to the client whatever (s)he wants to hear.

And what the patient wants to hear are certain ideological trends that are inseparable from the incremental efficacy of the therapeutic process, as argued by Thomas J. Csordas, and that may be said to be describing in general the practice of spiritual therapy in Japan today. Illustrating these ideological trends by four continua in Chapter 6, I attempted to demonstrate that the majority of my informants adhere to a liberalised ideology. These are (1) a non-fearful image of transcendental beings; (2) a will to share spiritual therapy as a self-cultivation technique and not as a rare, magical power; (3) a fascination with what are seen as the efficiency of American life precepts, which are more frequently offered as the solution rather than the classic nationalist arguments of a “uniquely unique” Japan; and (4) a consumerist behaviour in the spiritual therapy process that betrays an *otaku*-like interest in locating one’s favourite explanatory models in new combinations of therapies instead of believing in an overall “grande spiritual narrative” comprising the aforementioned moral statements, which might otherwise have encouraged the socialization of the individual.

Yet, socialization is what seems to be missing, and in part, still to be offered by spiritual therapists in contemporary Japan. In Chapter 7, it became apparent that beyond its possible inclusion in contemporary “fashionable” products of the beauty culture, of

the medicalisation of depression or of the media-fuelled self-searching frenzy of the last 15 years, professional spiritual therapy attracts candidate-practitioners because it allows socialisation not particularly through its “grande narrative”, but through its mere practice. Firstly, as a “spiritual *ba*”, a new organisational setting, it allows the socialisation of the post-bubble generations of Japanese who have been alienated by the invalidation of their promised life path. Secondly, as a reaction to the gender discrimination that can still be observed at the Japanese workplace and in the household, the practice of spiritual therapy offers an escape for women in addressing such issues such as sexual harassment or domestic violence, and an opportunity to overcome the pressure of social expectations, such as quitting work after marriage, and sometimes even providing the opportunity to gain financial independence. Thirdly, I argue that the spiritual business corresponds to a complex narrative community that permits the socialization of the contemporary Japanese self, for whom the value relativism of post-modern society has provoked an identity crisis. Spiritual therapy not only allows the practitioner/client to find his/her own meaning within the plethora of new spirituality explanatory models shared by the rest of the community, but, most importantly, by turning the rising need of self-expression into a this-worldly benefit, it answers to the functional morality characterizing the seeking of these benefits in Japan, as identified by Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe.

This conclusion does not, of course, annul the negative aspects of the spiritual business. It is only the result of a logical sequence of thought that started with the question of how much Mr Suzuki earns, moving into how does his session work, then to what kind of ideas he is promoting and finally to what his popularity says about contemporary Japanese society. However, in developing my analysis and the more I



understood the reasons behind my observations, my critical tone veered often to empathy, reflecting my realisation that all that I have been able to write in this thesis has been possible precisely because my informants were adhering to this morality (whether it is the expressive humanism of Paul Heelas or the moral materialism of Reader and Tanabe) of wanting to share their experiences with the rest of the world. The impression that the spiritual therapy phenomenon presents two facets is based therefore not on the reality, but on our inability to discard the good-bad dualistic prism and see the world as polyphony of experiences. What saved me from letting that dualism ruin my methodology, despite the ups and downs of ethnographic fieldwork, was my curiosity of whether or not I could convince both the spiritual therapists and their critics that the phenomenon is much more complex than it seems. The following section will develop a theoretical model that describes this complexity.

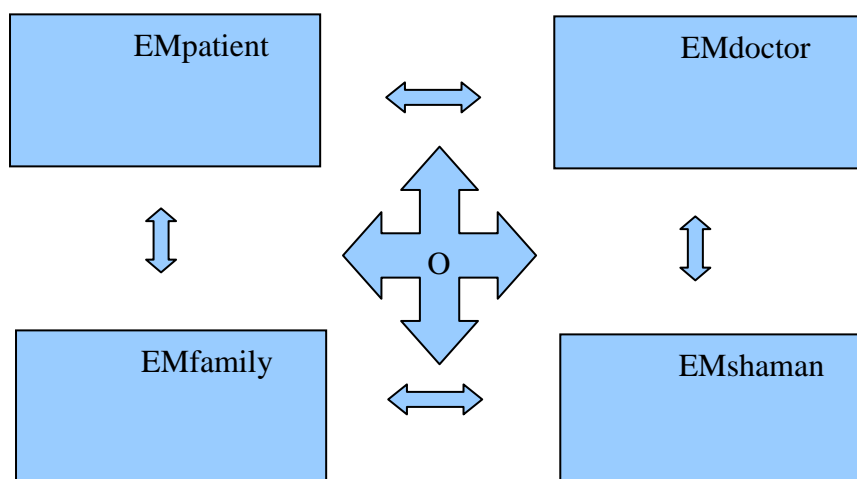
## **8.2. The heteroglossia of the spiritual therapy phenomenon: not just relativism**

The theoretical model I develop in this section is in large part my adaptation of Shimoji Akitomo's analysis encapsulated in his representation of the clinical process of a patient who seeks the help of both shamanistic and biomedical specialists in order to find an explanation for hearing voices in his head. Professor Shimoji argues that at any point in time the heteroglossia of explanatory models<sup>147</sup> used during this process can be described by the following figure (from Shimoji, 1998, 383).

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<sup>147</sup> The medical anthropological concept of 'explanatory model' was devised by Arthur Kleinman to describe 'the notions about an episode of sickness and its treatment that are employed by all those engaged in the clinical process' (1980, 105).

Figure 8.1 Shimoji Akitomo's explanatory model (EM) of a cross-section of the clinical process



This clinical process or discourse can be described at any given point in time by four basic explanatory models provided by the patient, the family, the psychiatrist and the shaman. For the doctor, the explanatory model reached the diagnosis of a form of schizophrenia, while for the patient, his family and the shaman, it was the condition locally known as *kami daari* (the shaman's initiatory illness)<sup>148</sup> which provoked those same symptoms. These explanatory models continually interact with each other and their combination only makes sense at point zero, which Shimoji calls, using Lacan's terminology, the *point de capiton*. Point zero is where the clinical setting holds together,

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<sup>148</sup> Matthew Allen notes that *kami daari* is commonly translated as 'revenge of the gods' and inflicts Okinawans believed to be born to become *yuta*. Symptoms include loss of appetite, vomiting, nausea, dizziness, vagueness, high blood pressure, genital bleeding, vomiting blood, numbness in the hands and feet, anxiety, delusion, blurting out incomprehensible words, and a tendency to go into long monologues (2002b, 226).

the window from which the interaction between all of the explanatory models reaches a meaningful verdict and where the clinical discourse can be called ‘a clinical discourse’.

Employing Shimoji’s idea, I argue here that spiritual therapy should be seen through its *point de capiton*, where the interaction of its four aspects, the business, the therapeutic, the ideological and the social, gives us a full and meaningful view of the phenomenon. Merely focussing on any of these four dimensions is bound to translate into biased support for, or criticism of, spiritual therapy. Point zero, however, shows that spiritual therapy develops according to the fundamental features of a globalising new spirituality culture and expresses the morality of the fundamental this-worldly-benefit-seeking character of Japanese religious culture, which is adapted to express the physiomorphic, ideological and socio-economic changes of contemporary Japanese society. The popularisation of the phenomenon is due to the harmonization of the different voices - business, therapeutic, ideological and social - and its seemingly double-faceted nature stems from the temporary superiority of some voices over others. Indeed, just as in Shimoji’s case in which the interned patient still believed that his behaviour was the result of *kami daari* because most of his surroundings, including himself, believed so and thus it was so, the same can be said for spiritual therapy which seems at times to be fraudulent and at other times an effective treatment against depression, for example. The truth is that spiritual therapy, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, is all of what it can be said to be. The illusory supremacy of certain explanatory models/perspectives over others is only situational (depending on the political authority of the signifier) and to accurately understand the phenomenon in the future, the researcher needs to be able flexibly to see through these aspects which

are deliberately emphasized by either of his/her informants and/or his socio-cultural environment.

Ultimately, a complete study of the spiritual therapy phenomenon would include, therefore, equivalent levels of data both in quantity and quality from the other actors involved in the spiritual business: the media, the “spiritual teachers”, the owners of large academies and the clients. The novelty of the field and the lack of time during my field research prevented me from covering these other areas in any detail. But I hope to remedy this neglect during a planned programme of research at post-doctoral level in the next few years. Despite the economic crisis the spiritual business is still growing and further study of the phenomenon would allow me to discover more of its aspects and, most significantly, define the pattern of creation and influence upon the phenomenon of these temporary superiorities of certain voices of “the spiritual” (for example, Sakurai Yoshihide’s voice) over others. This present study is only the beginning.

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## Appendix 1: Sample of e-mails sent to potential informants

A 様<sup>149</sup>、

こんにちは。

はじめまして。ヤニス・ガイタニディスと申します。

A 様の HP を [www.teddyangel.com](http://www.teddyangel.com) にて見つけて、メールをさせていただきました。

現在、私は英国国立日本研究所の博士課程の学生として日本にしばらく滞在しております。

私の所属している研究所のホームページは [www.wreac.org](http://www.wreac.org) です。また、その中、私の名前は

<http://www.wreac.org/nijs/students/WREAC-People/Research-Students/Gaitanidis%2C-Ioannis/details.html> にて載っております。

研究としては日本人が安心と精神救済をどうやって・どこで求めるのかということに勉強していますが、特にスピリチュアル的な相談に乗っている職能者の話に興味を持っています。

A 様の能力と活動はそのような救済に影響を与えていると考えていますので、そのため、A 様に賛成していただければ、お話を伺えればと思います。

研究のフィールドというと人類学です。現代日本人は悩みを持っているときに、色々な方法でその悩みを解決しようとしていると思いますが、スピリチュアル・ヒーリングはその中の一つでしょう。そこは私の研究のテーマです。ご存知の通りこの数年間スピリチュアル・ヒーリングは西洋でもどんどん発展ってきて、多くの人々はそのヒーリングを求めています。「日本はどうでしょう？」ということに興味を持っています。

具体的に A 様の活動、相談の仕方、相談者に対しての感想、現代日本社会についての一般的な意見を聞きたいと思います。話は大体 2 時間で終わります。録音しませんが、ノートを取ります。また、話をする場所と日時を A 様に任せます。インタビューできる日時、2、3つの選択を下さればと思います。

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<sup>149</sup> Instead of A, the name of the therapist as it figured on his/her website was inserted in the text.

なお、私の研究に参加している方の匿名性は必ず保護されます。これは私の大学のルールですので、ご安心ください。また、日本語もちろん大丈夫です。

もし、質問があれば、是非お知らせください。

お忙しい中恐縮ですが、ご協力をよろしくお願いいたします。

お話できるのを楽しみにしております。

ヤニス・ガイタニディス

Ioannis Gaitanidis

National Institute of Japanese Studies

White Rose East Asia Centre

University of Leeds

UK

English Translation:

*Dear Mr/Ms A,*

*Good morning,*

*My name is Ioannis Gaitanidis.*

*I came across your website on [www.teddyangel.com](http://www.teddyangel.com) and considered e-mailing you.*

*I am a doctoral candidate at UK's National Institute of Japanese Studies and I am currently residing in Japan.*

*The website of the research centre to which I belong is [www.wreac.org](http://www.wreac.org) and my name figures on*

*<http://www.wreac.org/nijs/students/WREAC-People/Research-Students/Gaitanidis%2C-Ioannis/details.html> .*

*My research concerns how and where Japanese look for peace of mind and spiritual relief, and I'm in particular interested in listening to practitioners specializing in spiritual advising. I'm thinking that your abilities and activities influence such a relief and, therefore, would like with your agreement, to ask you some questions.*

*My research field is anthropology. I believe that contemporary Japanese look for various ways to solve their worries, and that one of them is spiritual healing. That is where my research focuses. As you know, in recent years in the West, spiritual healing has developed to an extent that many people rely on it. What about Japan?*

*More precisely, I would like to inquire about your activities, your style of counselling, your thoughts on those you advise, and your general opinion about contemporary Japanese society. The discussion should take approximately two hours. I will not use a recorder, but I will take notes. I entrust you with the choice of the place and time where this discussion will take place, but I am asking you to give me a choice of two or three possibilities.*

*I guarantee the anonymity of all participants in my research. This is my university's rule, be reassured. And, of course, I speak Japanese.*

*If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.*

*I am sorry to bother you and thank you in advance for your cooperation.*

*I am looking forward to talking with you.*

*Ioannis Gaitanidis*

*National Institute of Japanese Studies*

*White Rose East Asia Centre*

*University of Leeds*

*UK*

**Appendix 2: Sample of (free) attunement text**



**Dna  
Healing  
Reiki**

**instructions**



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**element energy center • [www.elementenergy.com](http://www.elementenergy.com)**

### **about DNA Healing Reiki**

DNA Healing Reiki is a very simple system, consisting of one symbol, a DNA Helix. It is meant to improve physical health by fixing any errors in a person's DNA or spiritual (energetic) DNA.

This energy is intended to work especially well for those with chronic or degenerative illnesses such as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Fibromyalgia, MS, and others. You can also use this energy to work on other health issues or to improve general health and well-being.

The idea is that degenerative, chronic illnesses, which are notoriously hard to cure using energy healing, are caused by an error or errors in the person's energetic blueprint (spiritual DNA). These errors can then be manifested and worsened in the physical body by contamination of the energetic system through an assault of negative energy on a person, or via a systematic draining of a person's life force energy due to psychic vampirism.

### **Usage**

Once attuned, you can imagine a DNA helix (like below) infused with golden-white healing energy flowing through the recipient's body. You can also use this like any other Reiki symbol to activate the Reiki flow through the palms of the hands.



For those with chronic illness, daily self-treatment is recommended.

For distance healing, visualize the DNA Helix being sent to the recipient, or use it in conjunction with whatever distance healing process you are comfortable with.

### **PSYCHIC PROTECTION**

Many people with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and similar illnesses have issues with others preying upon their energy system. You can use DNA Helix Reiki as a psychic shield to prevent others from encroaching on the energy system. This is especially important during the healing process. Envision for yourself or the client a fence made of light-filled DNA surrounding the aura. The Psychic Protection Flame (available for free at [www.elementenergy.com](http://www.elementenergy.com)), used in conjunction with DNA Healing Reiki, is especially powerful.

### **ATTUNEMENT PROCESS**

Use any Reiki attunement ritual of your choice and simply infuse the DNA Healing Reiki energy to the student along with the DNA Helix as a symbol.

### **NEW TOOLS AND SYMBOLS**

This manual has been purposefully left simple, because it's really about the energy. If you find new symbols, practices, or ways of using DNA Healing Reiki, please feel free to add to the system and share with others.



**More Reiki attunements and courses are available at  
Element Energy Center ([www.elementenergy.com](http://www.elementenergy.com)).**

**PLEASE SHARE.**

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You can share this manual freely provided it is left *entirely* intact.

You may not independently reprint, republish, or reuse the words in this manual for any reason.

You can give this manual to students that have paid you for an attunement,  
but you cannot resell this manually separately.

You are welcome to create your own manual,  
written entirely in your own words,  
to teach people how to use this energy.

You are also welcome to use this energy to create a new energy system.

For permission to translate, contact  
[light@elementenergy.com](mailto:light@elementenergy.com)

Thank you.

**Appendix 3: List of researchers interviewed during the preliminary fieldwork trip**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Location</i>
崔吉城 (Choe Kilsong)	University of East Asia (Shimonoseki)
佐々木伸一 (Sasaki Shin'ichi)	Kyoto University of Foreign Studies (Kyoto)
渡邊一弘 (Watanabe Kazuhiro)	National Showa Memorial Museum (Tokyo)
高松敬吉(Takamatsu Keikichi)	Kagoshima University (Kagoshima) – <i>retired</i>
井上順孝(Inoue Nobutaka)	Kokugakuin University (Tokyo)
川村邦光 (Kawamura Kunimitsu)	Osaka University (Osaka)
平山眞(Hirayama Shin)	Tōyō University (Tokyo)
神田より子(Kanda Yoriko)	Keiwa College (Niigata)
池上良正(Ikegami Yoshimasa)	Komazawa University (Tokyo)
Gerald Groemer	Yamanashi University (Kōfu)
Paul Swanson	Nanzan University (Nagoya)
Clark Chilson	University of Pittsburg
Ben Dorman	Nanzan University (Nagoya)
Ian Reader	Manchester University

**Appendix 4: List of informants (male, followed by female in alphabetic order)**

Pseudonym of spiritual therapist	Age	Appellation according to the therapist or to the therapy mostly practiced	Mentioned in section(s)
Mr Hosokawa	49	RMMS <sup>150</sup> therapist	5.4, 5.5
Mr Kenji	30	RMMS therapist	4.3, 5.4
Mr Kimura	65	<i>Reinōsha</i>	3.1, 6.3
Mr Kobama	36	Crystal healer	5.1, 7.3
Mr Kogura	65	<i>Reinōsha</i>	3.1, 5.3
Mr Matsuyama	62	<i>Reinōsha</i>	3.2, 4.4, 6.1, 6.2
Mr Nakamura	35	Masseur	4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 5.1
Mr Sasaki	54	<i>Reinōsha</i>	2.4
Mr Suzuki	41	Spiritual advisor	1.1, 2.1, 5.3, 7.3
Mr Takahashi	32	Theta healer	3.4, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 6.4, 6.5, 7.3
Mr Ushimoto	50	RMMS therapist	3.4, 4.5, 5.4, 6.2,
Mr Wakafune	36	Healer	4.4, 6.2
Mr Yogino	35	Hypnotherapist	3.2, 4.2, 4.4, 5.2

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<sup>150</sup> Rocky Mountain Mystery School.

Ms Azumi	44	Hypnotherapist	7.1
Ms Chizuko	47	Practitioner	4.3, 6.1, 6.3
Ms Fukuda	40	Aura therapy	6.2, 6.3
Ms Fukuyama	50	Hypnotherapist	3.1, 3.2, 6.5, 7.2
Ms Fumada	48	Spiritual teacher	3.3, 4.1, 4.3, 4.5, 6.1
Ms Hamata	40	Meditation healer	3.1, 3.4
Ms Hamazaki	53	Clairvoyant counsellor	4.3, 5.3
Ms Hirayama	27	RMMS therapist	3.1, 6.3, 7.2
Ms Hirosaki	60	Land healer	3.2
Ms Hosokawa	47	RMMS therapist	5.4
Ms Isomura	50	Reconnective healer	5.4, 6.2
Ms Itagaki	42	<i>Reinōsha</i>	7.3
Ms Iwakura	47	Aura-soma therapist	4.4, 7.3
Ms Iwato	37	Hypnotherapist	7.3
Ms Katı	43	Healer	7.2
Ms Kawamura	46	Masseur	3.3, 5.1
Ms Kawasaki	35	Hypnotherapist	3.1, 3.2, 4.2, 7.3
Ms Kayama	37	Angel therapist	2.4, 6.1

Ms Kikuko	46	Past-life reader	3.1, 3.3, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 6.2, 6.5
Ms Kimura	41	Metaphysiotherapist	4.3, 6.3, 6.4, 7.3
Ms Kinoshita	41	Aroma therapist	7.1
Ms Michiko	37	Aura-soma therapist	4.3
Ms Mimura	42	Hypnotherapist	4.3
Ms Minami	63	<i>Reinōsha</i>	2.3, 5.3, 6.3, 6.4, 7.3
Ms Miwa	47	Hypnotherapist	6.3
Ms Momoko	35	Holistic healer	5.1, 6.3
Ms Momoyama	39	Practitioner	4.4, 6.1, 6.3
Ms Motoya	52	RMMS therapist	6.2
Ms Motoyama	39	Counsellor	6.2
Ms Murakami	55	<i>Yuta</i>	3.1, 3.2, 7.2
Ms Murayama	45	Happiness navigator	3.3, 7.3
Ms Nakada	52	Counsellor	5.1, 7.2
Ms Nakata	37	Spiritual counselling	7.4
Ms Namihira	43	Therapist	7.3
Ms Nanase	37	Tarot reader	6.2
Ms Natto	80	<i>Ogamiya</i>	3.1, 5.3, 6.1

Ms Nishimura	54	Crystal healer	4.3, 4.4, 7.2
Ms Nishiyama	36	Spiritual channeller	7.4
Ms Noda	43	Spirit counsellor	3.2, 4.2, 6.4
Ms Okubo	69	<i>Reinōsha</i>	2.3, 2.4, 3.1, 3.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.3
Ms Reiko	37	Reiki healer	5.5, 7.3
Ms Sachikawa	56	Clairvoyant counsellor	7.1
Ms Sachimura	44	Therapist	4.1
Ms Saeda	41	Crystal healer	3.3, 4.2, 5.1, 6.3
Ms Sakura	35	Spiritual healer	3.2, 3.3, 6.5
Ms Sasakawa	36	Spiritual counsellor	4.3, 4.4, 5.1
Ms Satsuma	38	Spiritual counsellor	6.2
Ms Shibata	42	Psychic therapist	4.4
Ms Shimura	42	Hypnotherapist	6.2
Ms Suzuki	41	<i>Reinōsha</i>	3.1, 4.2, 5.1, 6.1, 6.5, 7.2
Ms Takashima	42	Healer	3.2
Ms Tonoda	36	Soul therapist	5.1
Ms Usumi	35	RMMS therapist	4.2
Ms Yamada	50	Light body worker	6.2, 7.2

Ms Yamato	42	<i>Kotodama</i> (magic words) counsellor	4.4
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**Appendix 5: Non-exclusive list of courses and corresponding fees at “spiritual academies”.**

Type of Class	Name	Example of Course and Length	Fees (¥ unless indicated)
Schools	Rocky Mountain Mystery School	Adept Course: 2 days	55,000
		Teacher Course: 6 days	319,000
		Ritual Master Course	\$7,000
		Channelling School: 12 days	1,260,000
	Japan Clearlight	Clairvoyant School: 13 months (152 hours)	1,035,000
	Yasuragi no Heya	A Course in Miracles: 3 years-monthly course	360,000
		Flower Essence monthly course: 8 or 10 months	10,000/month
	Anaguchi Keiko	Master Channeller course: 8 days	295,000
	En-Sof	Channelling School: 6 days	180,000
	Y and Y Healing Centre	Angel Reiki: 6 days	189,000
	Ka system	SP1 practitioner: 8 days	700,000
	Theta Healing Japan	Intuitive Anatomy: 3 weeks	222,000
	Neal's Yard Remedies	Aromatherapy Course: 12 hours	33,600
Homeopathy Course: 8 hours		31,500	



	Holistic Beauty College	Aura-Soma: levels 1,2 and 3 (108 hours)	399,000
	London School of Aromatherapy Japan	Aromatherapy: 3 days/month for 1 year	1,155,000
	Japan Holistic Academy	Hypnotherapy Master Course: 10 days	399,000
<b>Seminars</b>	Eric Pearl	Reconnective Healing Levels 1, 2 and 3: 6 days	249,000
	Trisha Caetano	Inner Child Therapy: 6 days	156,000
	Margaret Rogers	Metaphysiotherapy Levels 1 and 2: 12 days	650,000