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## FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS: THE CASE OF SHINNYOEN

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### Abstract

Women's rise to formal leadership roles in new Japanese religions has attracted considerable scholarly attention. However, few attempts have been made to examine women's formal religious leadership in contemporary settings, and little has been said about how their authority is constructed, supported, and legitimated within their organization. This paper examines the case of Shinnyoen and its current female leader, Itō Shinsō. The theoretical framework adopted for the examination draws on Weber's definition of charisma and its routinization and the organizational theory by Etzioni. The analysis shows that Itō Shinsō's effectiveness in religious leadership embodies the internal socio-cultural and normative organizational characteristics of the group. In particular, the level of compliance in highly regulated top-down and bottom-up social relationships as well as moral commitment reveal the essential relational property of Itō Shinsō's charismatic leadership.

Key words: female charismatic leadership, organizational theory, Shinnyoen

### 1. Introduction

This paper examines a case of formal female religious leadership in contemporary Japanese religious organizations. As a case study, it looks at Itō Shinsō (1942–), a woman who is the present second-generation leader of Shinnyoen, a Japanese new religious movement. The purpose of this article is to examine her charismatic leadership by linking it to its organizational

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context.<sup>1)</sup> To this end, this study combines Weber's theory of charisma (Weber, 1947; 1976) and Etzioni's organizational theory (Etzioni, 1961; 1964) to articulate the ways Itō Shinsō proves her charisma in the eyes of her followers. Findings of this study show that the process of legitimization of charismatic leadership draws primarily on the relational and socially-constructed dimension of her leadership within her organization and on the affectional bond between the leader and her followers that such embedded relational aspect delivers. While the founding couple of Shinnyoen, Itō Shinjō (1906–1989) and her wife Itō Tomoji (Uchida Tomoji, 1912–1967), relied on their extraordinary capabilities and personality attractiveness to legitimate their authority, with the current second-generation leader charisma has become a transferable and an impersonal quality inherent in the rigid top-down relationships of the institutional structure and a shared cultural value system that backs up such a structure. The discussion of such features draws upon findings of qualitative survey data collected in 2002–2004, 2010–2011 and 2015–2017.

## 2. Inheriting the charismatic authority: Itō Shinsō, the second generation leader

Shinnyoen (meaning “borderless garden of truth”) is a Buddhist organization founded in 1936. Originally affiliated with the Shingon esoteric school based in the Daigo monastery (Kyoto), it became an independent religious organization in 1946. The founders Itō Shinjō, who trained at Daigo monastery, and his wife, Itō Tomoji, based their doctrine on the teachings of the *Great Nirvāna sūtra* (*Mahāparinirvāna sūtra*, or *Nirvāna sūtra* in short; *daihatsumehankyō* in Japanese). Since 1951, the founders gradually promoted a religious practice open to lay practitioners, thus initiating a religious movement open to lay followers. The movement presently counts about 920,000 believers (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2017: 71). Shinnyoen started with a female co-founder endowed with extraordinary spiritual abilities. Itō Tomoji is actually regarded as the spiritual founder (*reiso*) of the movement. Her spiritual abilities were regarded as quite strong and she was credited with helping many people suffering from possession through her capacity to communicate with spirits. At the same time, her husband was able to interpret the meaning of her spiritual messages through Buddhist prayers (Inoue et al., 1994: 117). This activity became the foundation of the *sesshin*, a form of meditation that consists of the interaction between the practitioner and the spirit world through the guidance of trained spiritual guides called *reinōsha*. Since then, *reinōsha* have given guidance through their *reinō* (spiritual ability), advising followers on how to cultivate and elevate their Buddha nature (*bussei*) by adhering to

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<sup>1)</sup> Charismatic leadership has a wide range of definitions, especially since ‘charisma’ has varied meanings in different cultural and temporal settings. This paper draws upon Max Weber's conceptualization of charisma as being “set apart from ordinary people and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specific exceptional powers or qualities (...) regarded as of divine or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is regarded as a leader.” (Weber, 1947: 358–359).

Shinnyoen doctrine and by going through practical issues with them, such as individual problems and interpersonal relationships. In 1989, Itō Shinjō passed away, and following the passing of both he and his wife, leadership was left to two of their daughters. Of these two, their third daughter, Itō Shinsō became the current leader of Shinnyoen. She is one of the few women, along with her mother, to have reached the rank of *daisōjo*, the highest rank in the Japanese Buddhist clerical hierarchy. Neither Itō Shinsō nor her mother followed the rule of head shaving, a practice that is usually part of the ordination process for Buddhist monks and nuns. In this regard, Itō Shinsō is the first female priest in the one thousand-year history of the Daigo Shingon esoteric school to officiate in the main hall as *sampoin* (main rite officiant) with no shaven head. When Itō Shinsō inherited the leadership, the extraordinary qualities of the founders had died with them leaving their legacy, their designated leader and their group of followers, exposed to a critical testing period ushering into a new era.<sup>2)</sup> It is suggested here that high-speed growth of Shinnyoen since the 1980s can be related to its newly formed female leadership and her ability to transform her parents personal charisma into a de-personalized quality that can be learned and taught. As such, it becomes inherent in the practices and in the hierarchical relationships of the organization. In doing so, it embodies material and ideal interests of the followers while legitimizing the authority of the leader as the designated one to manage such recognition process.

In order to understand such process, this paper aims at exploring the operating mechanism within the organization that can help clarifying the mutual legitimization and institutionalization of charisma. For a large religious organization such as present-day Shinnyoen to maintain a charismatic authority and for its members to recognize and legitimize it, it is probably necessary to look at the ways organizational units, defined as a “social unit that serve specific goals” (Etzioni, 1964: 3) are capable to deliver expected and promised goods that bring well-being to followers who, in turn, legitimize Itō Shinsō’s leadership.<sup>3)</sup> In case of Shinnyoen, one form of

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<sup>2)</sup> This point is related to the question of the ‘routinization of charisma.’ According to Weber, all legitimate social authority is rooted in charisma, but because charisma is founded on a personal relationship between a followership and a leader, charismatic authority is inherently unstable. If the social organization is to survive, some form of routinization must take place establishing an orderly (or routine) determination of who legitimately wields power. According to Weber, the two principal types of routinization are traditional and rational-legal. In the traditional structure, a person is understood to inherit charisma in some way, often with mystical sanction, as in the case of religious leadership. In rational-legal authority structures, a set of laws or rules serves this purpose. Particularly with the death of the charismatic individual, there occurs a process of transformation by which the followers return to a more everyday existence, therefore charisma becomes routinized and traditional and/or rational-legal types of legitimation become important (Weber, 1947: 358–373).

<sup>3)</sup> As Etzioni (1964) claims, social units are “deliberately structured, constantly and self-consciously reviewing their performances, and reconstructing themselves accordingly” (1964: 3). The scholar also suggests that organizations require formally institutionalized allocation of rewards and penalties to enhance compliance with their norms, regulations, and orders. Most of the time organizations cannot totally rely on their participants to carry out their assignments voluntarily, to have internalized their obligations. For this reason, “the participants need to be supervised, the supervisors themselves need supervision, and so on, all the way to the top of the organization.” (ibid.) In this sense, the organizational structure is one of control, and the hierarchy of control is the most central element of the organizational structure. The analysis of the social units in Shinnyoen in this paper will help to elucidate such dynamics.

social unit is *suji* (lineage) headed by a lineage parent or *suji-oya*.<sup>4)</sup> It is the smallest social unit at the base of Shinnyoen organization. The main duty of a *suji-oya* is to closely supervise and guide the unit's members so that they, in turn, will become able to guide (*michibiki*) new members.<sup>5)</sup> As it will be discussed in the following sections, this close supervision creates strong bonds between members and the lineage, which holds an effective cohesive mechanism capable of centralizing authority and strengthening group unity. I argue that while charismatic leadership principles and routinization process may explain the case of Itō Shinsō, the dynamics embedded in the two main members' organizational hierarchies, the *reinōsha* and the *suji* structures, through which members express their expectations and find satisfaction, are to be indicated as the main source of the effectiveness and success of such leadership.

It is worth to point out here that the Shingon esoteric lineage of this movement also informs the way social units are formed as it promotes close circles of people according to the path of their spiritual evolution. To this end, the fixed top-down relationships—from Itō Shinsō down to the divisions, associations, lineage parents, guiding parents (*michibiki-oya*), guided child (*michibiki-no-ko*), and guided grandchild (*michibiki-no-mago*)—are incorporated into the organization and maintained as they are. According to Etzioni's organizational theory, it is the type of involvement and commitment of participants and the power used to direct members' behavior that may better explain the strength of an organization. Such involvement and power are measured in terms of 'compliance' (Etzioni, 1961: 10–11). If interpreted according such idea, Shinnyoen holds a "normative power" (1961: 40–41) expressed through intrinsic rewards, such as the opportunities members are given in engaging in the organization to achieve something of profound significance for their lives, as well as the prospect that through such engagement they can attain such profound significance. With its doctrine and teachings, it also promotes identification with such goals by encouraging members to be positive agents in society with their social contribution and volunteer work (Cavaliere, 2015: 54–57), while bonding members with a strong moral involvement that "tends to develop in vertical relationships" (Etzioni, 1961: 11).

In this regard, the purpose of this paper is to clarify how Shinnyoen female leadership is constructed around such normative-moral organization, and the process through which this is nurtured and acknowledged according to a mechanism of compliance immanent in the organization itself.

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<sup>4)</sup> *Suji-oya* (lineage parent) is a word that refers to the leader of a *suji* (lineage). The social unit usually counts from 10 to 100 members. If the number of affiliates supervised by a *suji-oya* increases beyond the *suji-oya*'s supervision capability, an independent lineage parent is established. This is called *suji-tate* (establishing a lineage).

<sup>5)</sup> *Michibiki*, meaning guidance, is how Shinnyoen members train junior members so that they take part of the basic *suji* social unit.

### 3. The charisma of Itō Shinsō

I would like to begin by applying the theory of charisma to discuss what type of leadership the present leader Itō Shinsō possesses, and what kinds of interactions or relationships link the leader to the followers.

Weber's (1947) analysis of charisma and charismatic authority is based on the notion that certain special qualities of the leader distinguish them from ordinary individuals. The charisma of Itō Shinsō's parents can be said to have been both supernatural and superhuman, thus complying with Weber's theorizing. Itō Shinjō and his wife Tomoji's spiritual abilities powerfully impacted the believers (Nagai, 1995: 303) and such capabilities were the source of their charisma: the leaders' power was established upon a process of transforming values by using their spiritual abilities to break away from established traditional Shingon doctrines and rooted practices. In turn, by recognizing the effectiveness of such power, followers validated and legitimated their charisma. In this parlance, charisma has a strong transformative power in that it brings about radical alteration of central attitudes. Thus, as Bendix (1960) puts it, this type of leadership may find a better expression in what he called "charismatic leadership" rather than Weber's "charismatic authority" (1960: 302) because charismatic leadership fulfills all extraordinary needs that 'transcend' ordinary routines and transform inefficient rooted practices. In these terms, Itō Shinjō and Tomoji's charisma conforms to the idea of the charismatic leadership discussed by Bendix.

According to Weber, the transformation of charismatic authority into a permanent institution occurs when the followers are ideally and materially motivated to continue the community they belong to and their relationships with one another, with an aim to stabilize the community (Weber, 1922 = 1976: 154). The basis for legitimacy in this case is not the personal qualities of the leader, but rules regarding the technique of selecting a new leader. Shinnyoen used the easiest way to transform charismatic authority into a routinized and institutionalized structure: hereditary charisma (*ibid.*). This occurs when a family member of the original charismatic leader is designated the new leader. Weber went on to claim that the transformation of charismatic authority implies that it can also be "taught and learned" (Weber, 1947: 1143). This education process includes specialized training and testing to attain charismatic perfection. As it happens, Itō Shinsō went through the tough Shingon training and reached the rank of *daisōjo*, the highest rank in the Japanese Buddhist clerical hierarchy. Therefore, the charisma of Itō Shinsō may as well be discussed according to Weber's idea of 'routinized charisma.' Yet according to believers, Itō Shinsō possesses not only positional charisma based on the hereditary process, but also a charismatic personality. When praying at festivals for example, believers following the leader, always call out her name "*Shinsō-sama!*" showing their devotion and entrusting her as the legitimate leader to lead them in their spiritual endeavour. Shinnyoen members are fully aware that the main role of the founders' daughter is to mediate for the success of the founders' doctrine

and to lead them to the achievement of the movement's vision and their ultimate spiritual goals. To this end, the endowment of exceptional powers is not a required personality characteristic, while she needs a specialized set of doctrine-based skills and communication techniques to reach the hearts and minds of those that follow her and constitute the core of her organization: the *reinōsha* and the *suji-oya*. By managing members' emotions through the work of *reinōsha* and the *suji-oya*, and by transforming members' individual experience in universal experiences through doctrine-based rituals and symbols, language, passionate commitment, emotional expressiveness, and personal congruence, Itō Shinsō creates an image of herself as a warm, sincere, emotional and 'genuine' charismatic leader. In this regard, while Weberian charisma is posited on a normative level where the focus is on charismatic beliefs alone, Itō Shinsō's case suggests a relational model of charisma where large quantities of collective energy and communion among group members are vital in sustaining it. By acknowledging Itō Shinsō as the legitimate successor according to a decision of the founders, Shinnyoen members are concurrently protecting the second-generation leader in order for them to achieve their ultimate goal. Moreover, they actively construct her charismatic leadership by partaking emotionally in the realization of it. The actors and the dynamics inherent in such constructing process of Itō Shinsō's charismatic leadership are discussed in the sections below.

#### 4. The charisma-conducive organizational environment of Shinnyoen

##### 4-1. The lineage (*suji*) system

Members of Shinnyoen are tied to each other through the face-to face relationship of *michibiki-oya*, the 'guiding parent'—the spiritual guide—that establishes a close, family-like tie between an experienced member and a junior adherent. A person can join a Shinnyoen group only if she or he is introduced by an adherent who is, in that case, practicing their *otasuke* (propagation). When a person is introduced to Shinnyoen, he or she is automatically connected with a lineage (*suji*) and placed under the tutelage of the *michibiki-oya* (guiding parent). The new member becomes *michibiki-no-ko*, the guided-child. If the guided-child finds his or her own guided-child, that new recruit becomes the guided grandchild, *michibiki-no-mago*, of the original guiding parent. Guiding parents are themselves dependent on the head of the lineage, the *suji-oya*, who is responsible for the entire lineage, *suji*. The terms 'parent' and 'child' within the *suji* refer to the spiritual level of the follower rather than the age. The spiritual level is indicated, for example, by different colours of Buddhist stoles worn during home meetings and ceremonies at Shinnyoen centres. The religious parent-child relationships are formed regardless of the place where the conversion takes place and irrespective of the location of the convert's residence. The guidance work aims at spiritual development as well as advising, helping and giving practical or emotional support to the newer adherent. The relationships will continue for many years and the 'children'—*michibiki-no-ko*—will be taught how to recruit new members as their own 'children.'



Such *suji* (lineage) system of Shinnyoen is an important organizational structure that strengthens its centralized system and its group cohesion. All converts continue to be led by their guiding parent even when they guide others to the faith, thus becoming themselves guiding parents, and regardless their achieved spiritual level. This rigid spiritual seniority ranking system maintains vertical relationships and strong emotional bonds between members while also securing and tying members into the organization. This mechanism is the foundation of the entire organizational structure and the centralized charismatic leadership of the movement is conspicuously represented in the *suji* structure itself.

The continuity and stability of the lineage mechanism is strengthened through practical everyday activities. In order to realize one's Buddha-nature (*bussei*), Shinnyoen followers must undertake three forms of actions called *mitsu no ayumi* (three practices): *kangi* (joyful giving) consisting of financial contributions to the organization; *otasuke* (propagation, or sharing the doctrine); and *gohōshi* (volunteer service). While the *Nirvāna sūtra* gives the doctrinal ground to the followers' social ethics, *mitsu no ayumi* matter for the actual practice of it. Followers are instructed since the beginning to practice *otasuke* (recruitment) daily to rescue non-members from an unhappy future life. Whenever a guided child has a question about the doctrine or does not understand the Buddhist rituals and services of Shinnyoen, the guided child must always address his or her own guiding parent first. A guided child normally does not directly question a lineage parent or higher officials. Only if a guiding parent cannot answer a question of the guided child, the guiding parent is allowed to approach directly the lineage parent. If approved by the guiding parent, the guided child may directly ask the *suji-oya* directly. In case of a problematic issue or difficult question that even the lineage parent cannot answer fully, they request spiritual guidance from a *reinōsha* (spiritual guide)<sup>6)</sup> in a *sesshin*. In doing so, the system both creates a fixed network that strengthens vertical relationships while preventing unapproved direct contact with upper rank members of the group. In sum, the system enables a top-down flow for instructions, orders, notifications, and guidance, while controlling the bottom-up flow of requests, reports and questions. In Shinnyoen terminology, this top-down and bottom-up flow is called '*jogu-bodai*' ('seek above to save all below') and its importance is emphasized continuously through the idea of *shozoku* (affiliation, belonging) principle found in the *suji* system.

It is argued here that the level of interdependency and compliance within the lineage social unit establishes continuity and stability, which becomes one important source of the centralized charismatic character of the organization. Essentially, the *suji* system establishes mutual emotional and structural bonds through which the charismatic leadership is passed down from the leader

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<sup>6)</sup> Shinnyoen members should achieve four spiritual levels: *daijō* (great vehicle), the entry level; *kangi* (happiness); *daikangi* (great happiness); and *reinō* (spiritual ability) (Nagai, 1995: 310). A steady level of commitment measured in terms of donation, propagation, volunteering and religious education elevates practitioners from *daijō* [great vehicle] to *reinō* [spiritual ability], which has four grades. Those who attain the level of *reinō* are able to give spiritual advice during the *sesshin* and can give an evaluation of the practitioner's spiritual advancement. Average adherents usually tend to stop after reaching the level of *reinōsha*, which by itself requires long training also through the *sesshin*.



to members and it is constructed bottom-up from members to the leader. In this way, the charismatic power is apportioned to a certain degree among disciples and members of the leader (Etzioni, 1961: 10), which produces a charismatic hierarchy necessary to operate the organization to which all members belong. The process of mutual validation between guiding parent and guided child, and the emotional dependency that is constructed through the *suji* system enable members to gradually move up, nominally and spiritually, in the organizational structure. The nearer a follower gets to the leadership, the more likely he or she is to experience the charismatic leadership and bring in his or her personal share of charismatic power. This central process maintains motivation to participate in the *suji*-sponsored activities, the movement events and meetings, while also boosting feelings of satisfaction, enthusiasm, and competitive spirit, which also strengthen group cohesion.

Current leader Itō Shinsō stands at the top of this hierarchical order and acts as supreme leader. However, she is not directly part of this *suji*-based hierarchical system since she virtually supervises all social units in the organization at all levels. For this reason her followers feel that, despite her being their leader, she actually transcends it. Her charisma is constructed through the *suji* structure that depends on her as the virtual head of such centralizing hierarchical organization to which she does not belong, although she legitimizes it. This is an important feature of Shinnyoen, and it is argued here that the form of this centralizing hierarchical structure is central in understanding the leadership of this religious movement.

#### 4-2. *The reinōsha (spiritual guide) system*

A key element in Shinnyoen doctrine is the belief in the spiritual world (*reikai*) where the deceased members of the Itō family (namely, founders Itō Shinjō and his wife Itō Tomoji, and their two prematurely deceased sons) dwell together with the masters of Buddhism and the ever present source of truth (*shinnyo*), which practitioners can cultivate through the guidance of spiritual guides (*reinōsha*). In particular, it is the two prematurely deceased sons that are said to take on themselves the sufferings and misfortune of members through the intermediation of *reinōsha*. As it will be discussed in detail the following section, the spiritual training of *sesshin* (translated by Shinnyoen as “to touch the essence”), where *reinōsha* offer members guidance and advice for their Buddhist practice and to elevate their Buddha-nature, is essential to pursue the aims preached by the movement.

The *reinōsha* system consists of spiritual guides who have trained themselves to guide Shinnyoen followers in the realization of their spiritual goals. As of 2016, about 1,600 spiritual guides, 70% of whom are female, are active (interview held on December 22, 2016). During a *sesshin*, a *reinōsha* sits face-to-face with a follower and draws on *reinō* (spiritual power) to guide him or her toward a spiritual amelioration. For Shinnyoen members, *reinō*, spiritual power, and *reinōsha*, spiritual guides, are the core assets of their belief. This *reinō* is said to come from founders Itō Shinjō and Tomoji and the ‘two children (*ryōdōji*)’ (Shinjō and Tomoji’s eldest and

second sons, both deceased), who exist as leaders of this spiritual power system, the *reinōsha*, and as the source of the collective spiritual power that only Shinnyoen members can experience. As discussed further in the paper, although the very goal of the *sesshin* is to ‘touch the essence’ of the spiritual power, the kind of guidance that is offered in the session encompasses all aspects of individual life, about the member’s health and mental condition, family and social life. Therefore, while the lineage provides cohesion by formally tying members through a family-like bond in a worldly organization, the *sesshin* conducted by *reinōsha* create an unconscious cohesion beyond individual *suji* through the strong emotional experience of the spiritual power. Such experience interrelates individuals through the intermediary of *reinōsha*, who enable them to get a glimpse of the *reinō* where everyone should equally find their Buddha-nature. For Shinnyoen members, this invisible spiritual power organization is the pillar of the religious organization and the source of its energy. Since the actual leaders of the spiritual power are the founders and their sons, Itō Shinsō’s position as hierarchical leader is subordinated to them and she does not surpasses *reinōsha* in terms of capacity to mediate with the spiritual world. Once again, her leadership does not rely on her spiritual powers but on her designated position as the first recipient of the esoteric rituals and practices that enable *reinōsha* to communicate with the spiritual world, a fact that all members fully endorse.

#### 4-3. *The function of the ‘sesshin’ in the construction of charismatic leadership*

As many of its members acknowledge, the most attractive feature of Shinnyoen is the “practice of *sesshin*.” As part of their religious practice, Shinnyoen adherents regularly attend *sesshin*, and they strive to put the advice or instructions received through *reinōsha* in the form of spiritual messages into practice. Most of the times, the advice consists in reflecting upon and addressing their own weaknesses so that they can ameliorate their spiritual status and contribute to the overall individual, family and friends’ wellbeing. For Shinnyoen members, the *sesshin*, through which *reinōsha* manifest the *Great Nirvāna sūtra* mystical power as well as the spiritual power of the founding couple and their sons, is primarily a means of resolving specified problems in their everyday life. At the same time, it enables believers to directly experience the attractive mystical power of the *sesshin* and, as such, it fosters members to strive toward the attainment of some degree of personal transformation. This practical, although intangible, outcome of the *sesshin* is what makes it both attractive and necessary. The frequency of *sesshin* and the required degree of self-reflection and needed training members are assigned through such spiritual messages is a barometer of the level of their spiritual attainment. Ultimately, by completing all required levels of *sesshin* the karmic cause-effect influence over their actions will lose its effect, virtue will accumulate, the nature of the Buddha immanent in each person will slowly be revealed, and their spiritual rank will be elevated. Therefore, for Shinnyoen believers, *sesshin* is not so much an attractive ritual and performance, although this also holds its appeal, but rather an essential teaching-based practice that directs their daily lives. *Sesshin* is itself the

core of salvation in Shinnyoen and therefore much more important than a formal ritual members are required to attend or venerate.

The importance of the *sesshin* also reveals the function of the *reinōsha* structure within Shinnyoen organization. Through the *sesshin*, the worldview and the doctrine-based guiding principles are passed down from the head of the organization, who is the repository of the doctrine, to *reinōsha* and onto the follower thus shaping members' values and morality, penetrating deeply into their lives constructing their ethics and belief in salvation. In this way, the spiritual guides contribute substantially to the formation of a faith group sharing a single morality. Through the *sesshin*, the spiritual guides undertake the role of clarifying the ultimate ethical purpose of Shinnyoen teachings by simplifying the messages through understandable, daily-life language applied to concrete examples in daily life, and helping the believers resolve their distress by communicating to the spiritual world, *reinō*, through them. They are specialists who employ a variety of esoteric methods to ultimately guide Shinnyoen members throughout the ideals and ultimate purpose that the religious order represents.

It is also important to acknowledge that *sesshin* are extremely effective as counselling sessions and for this very reason, *sesshin* are highly valued and sought for by members. In this regard, the kind of relationship that is established through the *sesshin* between spiritual guides and believers is very similar to the one between a counselor or therapist and his/her client in which abundance of sensitive emotions are brought forward during the counselling process. Counselling is a method of giving people appropriate advice as well as assistance and guidance in resolving personal or psychological problems. By listening to people who have come to them with some distress, uneasiness, suffering, pain or complaints, the counselor focuses on their emotional and responsive state, and advises them on how to solve such tensions so that they can find their own way to resolve their problems (Tsuji-mura and Matayoshi, 1996). This element is achieved splendidly by *sesshin*. For example, at a *sesshin* a member told a spiritual guide that she was distressed by a confrontational relationship with her husband and disharmony in her home. The spiritual guide consulted *reinō*, the spirit world, and informed her that the causes of disharmony was her emotional state that created a spiritual (*seishinteki*, psychological) instability, so advised her to purify her spirit through self-reflection that would help her to become more understanding and ultimately achieve a right attitude and personality change. Advice of this kind closely resembles counselling. Since the *sesshin* is accounted as a foundational practice in the movement, it holds a highly persuasive power and believers readily accept it. Moreover, the *reinōsha*'s advice is anything but abstract: although the *reinōsha*'s performance and his/her way of communicating with *reinō* makes it look like a mystical event, the spiritual guide eventually conveys concrete and detailed instructions, ensuring that mistakes or further psychological distress will not occur. Such level of clarity contributes to build the conviction on the side of the recipient that accepting such instructions will surely have a positive effect: simply acting accordingly will foster the self-change and personality development process that is required to

achieve the expected emotional and physical stability. The *sesshin*, therefore, incorporates a unique faith-reinforcing mechanism: the follower regularly receives the advice on needed changes and personality improvements; consequently he or she feels it is effectiveness and is calmed by its strong persuasive effects, which in turn reinforces his faith.

In this modern “disconnected society” (Ceremonial Occasion Mutual Aid Society, 2012), Shinnyoen members find in the *sesshin* an effective way to feel included and cared for, with *reinōsha* and peer members contributing to each other’s wellbeing for the sake, ultimately, of a harmonious society. The counselling effect of the *sesshin* on how to achieve one’s goal in the appropriate way is inherent in every individual decision members take. On the other hand, members would not endeavour in decisions without consulting the spiritual world first, since consulting *reinō*, whose existence is a fundamental asset of their faith, will provide them with the needed guidance and help them to see things from the right, doctrine-based, perspective. In other words, with the help of the spiritual guides, they become capable of understanding their true self, a fundamental personality development process that they can only gain through the help of *reinōsha*. They can gradually acquire a clear understanding of their identity and awareness of their position in society, which in turn allows them to realize how to approach others: by mastering their self-reflection abilities, members learn how adjust attitudes and behaviours so that they discover how to interact with others in a caring and loving way while, in doing so, gaining self-awareness and satisfaction. Moreover, by attending regularly the *sesshin*, they simultaneously acquire self-validation, social consensus, establish friendships and mutually beneficial relationships, permitting them to enjoy rich human relations. This also reveals to them what roles they should play in the wider society, outside of their religious group, and their social identity is established (Cavaliere, 2015: 223–231). Sociologists frequently point out that at the present time, for young people in particular, establishing one’s identity is a serious problem (Hommerich, 2017: 72–96). Shinnyoen members include far more young people than other religious groups, and the Youth Division and its activities play an important role in the movement (Cavaliere, 2015: 76–80).

Counselling functions and transformative power of *reinōsha*, and the *sesshin* are a major attractive element of Shinnyoen. The functions of the *reinōsha* system is precisely stipulated and their roles is clearly distinct from those of the *sujioya* (lineage parents) and other structures within the movement, such as the one consisting in those who have undergone Buddhist ordination and received traditional monastic ranks. As such, the identity of each individual is recognized accordingly. All members can attain a well-defined identity within the movement, and their roles and expectations are clearly defined. Even in the case a member plays different roles, for example being a *sujioya* and a *reinōsha*, the two identities do not compete each other and do not clash. In so doing, they are able to enjoy warm social interactions with others. In this way, Shinnyoen has an extremely profound impact on how members construct their own identities, both inside and outside the movement.

## 5. The construction of charismatic leadership through the *suji* and *reinōsha* structures

### 5-1. The authority of the 'suji' and of the 'reinōsha'

So far the discussion has led to understanding the different functions and effect of the *suji* and *reinōsha* structures: in the form of a deep moral involvement through the *suji* because of its top-down guidance system; and a strong emotional dependency with *reinōsha* through their spiritual guides in the *sesshin*. However, the charisma and authority of the *sujiyoja*, lineage parents, are not the same as those of *reinōsha*, the spiritual guides. Individual evaluations, the managing of symbolic power (for example, the language used in consultation and the suggested methods of practice in daily life), acceptance, and the handling of *reinōsha* and *sujiyoja*'s guidance are different. In many ways, the social dynamics and followers' emotional commitment discussed above well apply to Etzioni's (1964) idea of moral involvement. According to Etzioni, organisations that require moral involvement construct a system of control that depends on shared values, which are promoted and passed onto members and to which members comply with because they feel rewarded (1964: 3–4). The organisation generates and maintains these values, which are represented in signs and symbols (visual, verbal, behavioural and conceptual) that members internalise thus becoming their own and guide their identity. Individuals within the organisation act as one, with a very intensive commitment to the organisation and to what they are trying to achieve. In such organization the authority of the leader is both based on his/her power to give directions and require compliance (conforming, acquiescing, yielding to others); and the charisma they show, in that he or she possesses the right to lead by virtue of their personal attributes (Etzioni, 1961: 232–34). In these terms, charismatic authority is legitimated by the respect that followers have for the attributes and the performances of a specific individual, and such charismatic authority becomes a major source of compliance from his/her subordinates (Etzioni, 1964: 4). The mechanism of compliance is constructed vertically through participation in collective activities and actions that fulfill the need of a shared symbolic authority and increase motivation to participate in such collective activities, which in turn creates a strong sense of belonging. For Shinnyoen members, the lineage parent organization is a formal, vertically fixed relationship system that regulates practical activities in daily life while also providing a specific symbolic logic to interpret their life. As an upper level group, the lineage parent organization is impacted by the control of the lower level groups (guided children and guided grandchildren), which strengthens the central authority of the religious order and its group cohesion. At the same time, *reinōsha* control and foster the moral involvement and emotional investment that collective activities require, thus complying with the *suji* authority while also imposing their authority.

From the perspective of the organization, this two-level form of authority within Shinnyoen is highly effective: it praises the moral involvement of the individual while controlling such individual moral involvement through fixed vertical relationships and a high level of compliance

with the *suji* and *reinōsha* systems. According to Etzioni, such moral involvement includes pure moral involvement and social moral involvement (Etzioni, 1964: 10–11). The former is based on the internalization of norms and identification with authority while the latter is based on psychological factors under pressure from the group and its members. Both features are present in Shinnyoen. The spiritual guide organization is based on pure moral involvement and the lineage parent organization is based on social moral involvement. In the religious movement, therefore, these two types of authority, that of the spiritual guides and that of the lineage parents, coexist and reinforce each other. On one hand, *reinōsha* authority controls and manages spiritual and moral dilemmas; on the other, *suji* authority controls social moral involvement through their worldly external rules and expected roles. The activities controlled by these two systems are both expressive (in that they train members in the symbolic and expressive aspects of the tasks) and instrumental (in that they create and maintain moral allegiance). As such, charisma resides not in the leader but in the relationship and compliance that lower level leaders and subordinates are capable to establish. The discussion so far shows that only these characteristics and behaviors give Itō Shinsō as a leader the potential to form charismatic relationships with his or her subordinates. The leader characteristics and behaviors above are necessary but not sufficient to ignite charisma within subordinates. As Etzioni explains, a high level of self-confidence and a strong feeling of certainty among subordinates are thought to be a better charisma-conducive environment (1964: 11). The setting created by *suji* and *reinōsha* provides substantial moral involvement and stability on the part of the leader and her followers in that an exceptional effort, behavior, and sacrifices are required on the part of both the leader and followers. Shinnyoen members are not only satisfied with the supervision and guidance they receive, but they are also highly motivated and willing to make personal sacrifices to achieve the vision the leader has defined. This interdependency and compliance is the actual source of Itō Shinsō' charismatic leadership.

In the next section I will consider three final questions: What kind of goal is each internal structural system working to achieve? What role does each system play? What kinds of functions does each system have?

### 5-2. Goals and roles of the 'suji' and 'reinōsha' structures

As discussed above, members of a religious group such as Shinnyoen are highly motivated to engage in their movement because of the rewarding feeling that such engagement conveys and the emphasis that is put on the same ultimate goals. Shinnyoen members have to pursue different secondary goals and face several challenges in order to achieve the vision the leader has defined. For this purpose, a system might strive toward two or more goals, and there might be a disparity between the proclaimed goals and the tasks that are performed. Different tasks for different purposes are assigned to the individual within the subordinate units he or she belongs to, and each should be independently, but simultaneously, be carried on. The *suji* and



*reinōsha* are rewarded by the moral involvement required by their duties, which in turns is translated into amelioration in their hierarchical position as well as the symbolic compensations they receive, both from their subordinates and the leader herself. Such reward-making mechanism is essential in creating authority or respect. This mechanism will be discussed below.

### 5-3. Relations between spiritual guides and lineage parents

Day-to-day guidance of followers is performed by the *michibiki-oya* (guiding parents) within any given *suji* (lineage). Such parents work hard at recruiting and teaching Shinnyoen doctrine to guide children as a *suji*, the social unit they belong to. At the same time, the adherents regularly participate in *sesshin* where they receive guidance regarding how to conduct their basic daily three practices (*mitsu no ayumi*). Attendance to practical activities organized by the *suji* and the several divisions in the organization, and *sesshin* sessions are the foundation of a Shinnyoen member. Yet for members, the fundamental goal is to improve in their spiritual training in order to achieve the same level of Buddha-nature of spiritual guides. *Sesshin* practice, which is intended to improve one's Buddha-nature (aspiration for enlightenment), is the most important goal. Consequently, it is assumed that the *reinōsha*, spiritual guides who handle spiritual problems, have greater authority than the *suji-oya*, the lineage parents.

According to Etzioni, a person can have administrative authority over some subordinates and personal authority over other subordinates at the same time (Etzioni, 1961: 14–16). Certainly, many of the Shinnyoen spiritual guides act as lineage parents guiding their children, and many lineage parents act as spiritual guides who give spiritual guidance. Both fill specialized positions—in other words, they participate in one type of activity—but many roles can be combined in a single agent. Guidance activities, practical activities, rituals and goals are decided and defined clearly in Shinnyoen doctrine and within the hierarchical organization, so there is no contradiction in filling two roles, that of the parent and of the spiritual guide. Of course, a hierarchical system is effective if goals and methods conform to that system, which would suggest that the *suji* and *reinōsha* system cannot work efficiently if they overlap.

However, there is an interesting qualitative interrelation between the guidance activities of a parent and the spiritual guidance of a spiritual guide. Spiritual guides are recognized as belonging to an upper-level charismatic structure that serves to fulfill the need to supervise spiritually lower-ranked members. The goals of the lineage and guiding parents, on the other hand, should aim at cultivating Shinnyoen members so that they become positive agents of society where they engage in activities for the community wellbeing. In this parlance, improving one's Buddha-nature is identical to the goal of aspiring to a better society: individual and spiritual attainment cannot happen without social engagement, as much as an ethical social engagement requires a deep spiritual training. All Shinnyoen members are guided in the type of social activities they can conduct based on their spiritual attainment. Although it is not a requirement, many adherents train themselves at the Shinnyoen-sponsored institute Chiryū Gakuin [Dharma School] in order



to learn Buddhist teachings before stepping forward in social activities where they can experience Buddhism in everyday practices. In this view, the relationship between the spiritual guide system and the lineage parent structure is cooperative and interrelated where ultimate goals and vision are shared.

#### 5-4. Leadership of the spiritual guides and lineage parents

The two interrelated structures of *suji* and *reinōsha* hold different types of leadership. In the first structure, spiritual guides, as specialists capable of intermediating with the spiritual world *reinō*, share in and possess the charismatic authority of the top leadership represented by the founders and their successor, Itō Shinsō. In the *suji* structure, the members of the guiding parent organization, who act as managers, maintain vertical relationships as in a utilitarian organization (Etzioni, 1961: 31–33).

In Shinnyoen, the exceptional capabilities inherent in the mediation with the spiritual power are not simply located only at the top or limited to a restricted number of specialists, but encompass the entire structure through the spiritual guides. The managerial aspects required by an efficient organization as it is in the utilitarian case, are structured in subordinate social units, *suji*, in the form of the guiding system, *michibiki*, which possesses defined scope and importance. The guiding parent system is an efficient body made of competent management (instrumental) units. It is an effective organization that serves the more direct goals of the religious order and, through its interrelated vision, supports the organization of the spiritual guides. All parents exercise leadership and control both through the expressive social activities (attendance at meetings, memorial services, and *sesshin*) and the instrumental activities (proselytizing, daily practice) of their guided children.

Hierarchically, spiritual guides are at a level lower than that of Itō Shinsō, who is at the top. However, in terms of prestige and status, *reinōsha* act as specialists who communicate directly with the source of spiritual power, the founders and their sons, and guide followers toward the higher goals related to spiritual questions by applying their spiritual power to activities related to direct, practical, goals. They act by resolving members' distress through counselling, clearly informing guiding parents about what to teach and informing followers on what they must do to achieve spiritual improvement. Because their decisions are made by using their spiritual powers, they are often not based on rational grounds. In these terms, acceptance by guiding parents who, in several cases, play both roles, and believers' recognition of the specialists' decisions is, in principle, a matter of unconditional trust. There are no rational grounds for accepting the advice, guidance, or teaching of spiritual guides because believers, and sometimes guiding parents, lack the knowledge and ability needed to judge the activities of specialists.

In sum, the leadership of the spiritual guides is functional to the top charismatic leadership in that it is fundamental in situations when the moral involvement of guiding parents or believers is required. Moreover, their leadership permits them to hand down decisions related to the goals

to the guiding parents, giving them the role of controlling expressive activities. In sum, Shinnyoen spiritual guides are dependent on purely normative and spiritual relationships, and the guiding parents are dependent on social and moral relationships. These differences and interrelationships are conducive of a cross-structural and top-down shared charismatic authority that helps constructing a bottom-up charismatic leadership, as explained below.

## 6. Shinnyoen female leadership

If analyzed according to Weber's idea, Itō Shinsō, the current Shinnyoen leader, embodies irrational elements as the heir and guardian of the doctrine and its spiritual goals, which contributes to the construction of her charismatic leadership. However, this paper has demonstrated that such charismatic leadership is better explained by looking at the charisma-conducive organizational environment, as articulated in Etzioni's organizational theory. It is the efficient management of the structures of *suji* and *reinōsha* under the leader that are central in the construction of a charismatic authority in the organization. They are primarily involved in deciding social activities and reinstating the symbols and power of the leader's vision through instrumental activities. Considering this point, the charisma of Itō Shinsō is not the pure, superhuman charisma of a leader as defined by Weber (1904: 5) but it is a successful hereditary charisma that is supported from within the organization through an efficient passing down and sharing of charisma, and bottom-up construction of leadership.

The charismatic structure of Shinnyoen organization changed from pure charisma in the initial period and transformed into routinized charisma in the era of the second-generation leader. Under the routinization process of the initial charisma, the strength of the charisma was not diminished; instead, it was redistributed. The charismatic top rank of the first-generation leaders was later transformed through specialization of the upper and middle ranks of *reinōsha* so the religious order maintained its charisma within the organization. With the second-generation leadership, the leader undertakes a more functional role than that of preserving charisma. The main goal is to preserve the ultimate vision by offering guidance to the two central structures, the *suji* and *reinōsha*, so that they can, in turn, guide followers to strive, strengthen and reform their moral involvement. This is a much needed process to avoid degeneration, which may accompany the routinization process. Constructed in this way, Shinnyoen charismatic leadership seeks to create a feeling of oneness with the leader and the structures within the organization ensures moral faith is cultivated in the religious organization itself. The spiritual guides and guiding parents are in constant contact with the members and create strong moral faith through the practice of *sesshin* and close vertical relationships. The leader, on the other hand, has opportunities to interact with the members, although most of the times at distance, because of her role as a leader. Still, these encounters strengthen their moral involvement because they are held during highly emotional and symbolic ceremonial activities.

In synthesis, Itō Shinsō' leadership is based on two types of charisma. One is the charisma created by the devotion of the followers toward the leader who maintains the final vision of the movement through the doctrine. The other is a charisma-conducive environment formed by the members' compliance to norms, rules, and expectations of the organization as a whole.

## 7. Conclusions

Charisma in present-day Shinnyoen is not that of a charismatic female leader, rather, it is a charismatic relationship based on unique hierarchical leadership system and a charismatic organizational mechanism. We can conclude that the foundation of charisma in Shinnyoen is based on an efficient overlapping of types of powers inherent in the different structural systems of religious movement. These are: 1. the normative managing power of the fixed top-down structure (the lineage, *suji*); 2. the counselling power of the *sesshin* practice where members recount of personal experiences, stories of distress; and 3. the exceptional power of the *reinōsha*, who can mediate with the spiritual world. The several top-down and bottom-up relationships established among members and leaders of the different social units are the source of the charismatic authority within the religious organization. At the top of this organization stands the current leader Itō Shinsō who is not part of any specific hierarchical sub-structure, as she transcends them in the role of leader, although she is the model and the goal of all members of the organization. As such, Shinnyoen charismatic leadership is an interesting case of charismatic authority supported by highly efficient internal structures that build a charismatic organization.

In this respect, the increased membership, the spiritual guide and the lineage parent system, and the importance of women also in the person of its female leader, make Shinnyoen a unique case among Japanese new religious movements.

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