The Recruitment System of Japanese Spiritual Communities: Environmentalism as a Fishing Hook

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Abstract

This research investigates the recruiting mechanism of the Konohana Family Community and the way it attempts to attract new members by branding the community as an organic agricultural initiative that practices community life. The conversion process through which members go through prior to their membership is analyzed via the Lofland and Stark model, and the environmental and social approach of the community are compared with two schools of thought: Deep Ecology and Social Ecology. The community members fully presented three steps of the Lofland and Stark model, two were seen occasionally, and another two were seldom seen. In addition to these findings, it was also notes that although the community's doctrines have extensive similarities with both Deep Ecology and Social Ecology schools of thought, in light of practices that put a heavy burden on the environment, and considering the community's social structure, the Konohana Family's environmental and social practices are not aligned with either of the two. In the view of Konohana Family members, environmentalism is a manifestation of high spirituality, and hence, spiritual improvement is the first objective of all community members. Therefore, it is safe to say that the environmental objective of the Konohana Family is promoted to attract people who wish to make a difference to the environmental condition of the earth, while the underlying aim is to alter their set of values so that spiritualism will prevail as the most significant.

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Glossary of Konohana Family Community Terms

Getting over the ego – in KH, the ego represents the role that humans took on themselves, which is not their genuine *self*. It is everything they had learned during their lifespan, yet what they were also hiding behind to not show their true self. It combines humans' attachments to materialistic matters, relationships, thoughts and emotions, and the concept of having those things as "mine". It is also, according to KH, what prevents people from raising their spirituality.

Heliocentric calendar – KH claims that humans can be analyzed by looking into the given sets of characteristics they are born with. They analyze these characteristics by the position of the planets at the time and place that given person was born. Each planet has meaning, and the angles the planets form in a heliocentric map also indicate what characteristics these people have.

The divine will – the word *divine* is sometimes interchangeable with Shinto gods and goddesses. However, it can also indicate faith or a rule that operates independently by cosmic laws. It is an abstract term that suggests that there is a reason for everything that is happening beyond human perception or ability to understand. According to Jiiji, members of KH should operate by this law, which they can hear if they only put their ego aside and listen.

Katakamuna – the original theory of the Katakamuna is based on the myth that 13,000 years ago, Japan was inhabited by people called Katakamuna People. According to the story, the Katakamuna civilization is said to be the ancestors of present-day Japanese. These people could sense the potential of a phenomenon prior to its existence. It was said that for many years the Katakamuna theory was hidden from human beings because humans were far from a spiritual state that could support the understanding of the Katakamuna. In 1949, a physicist named Satsuki Narasaki (In Japanese: 楢崎皐月) discovered the Katakamuna and unlocked it for five years.

Karma – according to KH, there is a yin and yang tendency in all humans. The amount of yin and yang in a given person makes their karma and indicates the quality of their personality in various affairs. Karma can be analyzed by the strokes in the Chinese characters of a person's first name, and by the number of the Chinese characters in their first name.

Acronyms

KH – Konohana Family Community

HC – Heliocentric Calendar

NRM – New Religious Movements [in Japan]

NNR – New New Religions [in Japan]

GEN – Global Ecovillage Network

EDE – Ecovillage Design Education

Preface

When I first visited the Konohana Family Community (KH) in October 2017, I expected to visit an ecovillage, a type of community I was eager to research. It was not long before I realized that the community I had just come to was not based on the values I had expected, but on something entirely different; environmental aspects of their practices were set aside in favor of other values. Although nobody likes to admit they were wrong, the impression I had reading previous researchers' work on KH was that I was not the only one who was bewildered by the gap between the community's definition and their practices. It takes extensive knowledge and preparation to appropriately comprehend and analyze KH, and pre-work concerning only ecovillages and self-sustaining communities is insufficient.

Luckily, and unexpectedly, my field work had to be split into two segments, with one month of research followed by another two months, with over a month's break in between. This break gave me the opportunity to reexamine my theoretical framework, gain more knowledge about communities in Japan, and reconsider the community's definition in light of what I had learned during my stay there. By deepening my knowledge about the realm of Japanese intentional communities, be they agriculture-based, spirituality-based, or religion-based, a clearer picture of KH was revealed, and many of the beliefs and practices other researchers and myself considered to be unique to KH turned out to be prevalent in new Japanese religions. The realization that KH is a form of new religion has shed light on much of the community's conduct and gives answers, even if partial, to the vast majority of the fundamental questions I had regarding the community.

Yet, the contradiction between the image of KH I had before visiting compared with the impression obtained after an encounter with the community, made me wonder what the incentives of KH members were to brand themselves as something they are not? It was even more confusing to realize that many of the members who engage in the community today had had the same impression as I did prior to their first visit, and despite agreeing that they did not initially understand KH's values, they still made the decision to become lifetime members and to commit to a community that was so contrary to their expectations. This question of the transition from non-member, with a set of interests and values, to member of KH, with a different set of interests and values, triggered me to investigate the transformation undergone by members when they joined the community, and that was the topic of my master's thesis. In this research, I try to dig deeper into this transformation and to understand the delicate

processes that are essential for potential members to go through on their way to becoming members of such a community.

From an understanding of this journey of member recruitment, I realized that an understanding of the mechanism through which members are recruited to join KH could have much wider implications for the study of similar communities. As many traits and characteristics of KH are shared with other spiritual and religious groups in Japan, and in other societies, this understanding of the recruitment mechanism can lead to an understanding of similar groups and religions, and by extension, of human behavior, both from a psychological and sociological point of view. Hopefully, KH can be a leading case study to examine when considering other similar communities.

Lilia Griffin
Kyoto, Winter 2022

1. Introduction

This work will focus on spiritual communities in Japan, their characteristics, the way they deal with environmentalism, and how they portray themselves when interacting with new members, in an attempt to understand how spiritual communities' recruiting mechanism works. To understand these topics, Konohana Family Community, a spiritual group located in Fujinomiya, Shizuoka Prefecture in Japan, was chosen as a case study, and the community's characteristics, operating system, and social structure are examined. To understand spiritual communities, first a comprehensive literature on religions, new religions and members recruitment will be presented. Then, the environmental aspect of spirituality, starting from Western schools of thought and continuing to the Japanese environmental movements will follow. Based on the literature of these topics an examination of Konohana Family community will be made. Then, a discussion of the case study will be analyzed based on the existing literature, and eventually conclusions regarding spiritual communities recruiting mechanism will be made.

1.1 A family beyond blood relations

In 1994 the Konohana Family Community was established by fifteen adults and five children, who had the intention of starting a community in the countryside of Fujinomiya, Shizuoka Prefecture. Initially, it was called Konohana Farm (*konohana nō en*) and was established after the group's leader, Jiiji[1], had gathered supporters for his idea of starting a new way of living as *"one big family, beyond blood relations"* (from the official KH website). It was first named Konohana Farm, and later (at an unknown date) the community changed its name to Konohana Family (KH). The name "Konohana" derives from the name of the Shinto goddess of Mt. Fuji, *Konohana Sakuyahime no Mikoto,* and the word "family" (in Japanese フ ァ ミ リ ー), which is a part of its name, indicates the underlying principle of the community: to live as one big family. As of August 2021, KH consisted of 89 members: 32 males and 57 females, of which 61 are adults and 28 children (see table 1). Since the community was established, about 150 people have engaged with it as members (as current members recall), although it is only recently that KH has established a system of membership registration. These

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[1] Although Jiiji was named Isadon at the time of my data collection, to avoid confusion he will be called Jiiji throughout this thesis, including in quotations that originally referred to him as "Isadon".

days, the community's income consists of a variety of channels: organic agriculture, lectures, educational programs, a café and shop named Lotus Land, a guesthouse, food stands at local events, monthly events, handyman services, a Tanpopo healing massage and treatment clinic, and other occasional work such as selling pre-ordered lunch boxes and putting on performances. KH also offers a 'natural therapy program' which helps individuals suffering from mental illnesses and *bad habits* (this usually refers to substance abuse, cigarettes, and alcohol) to heal without medicine through the spiritual guidance of Jiiji and the help of members.

The work in the community is divided into several teams; the rice-paddy team, harvest team, seedling team, field team, Lotus Land team, office team, child-raising team, central team (house cleaning, laundry, etc.), kitchen team, and construction team. Work is done seven days a week, since the community is *"striving to live like nature, and just as the sun will not take a day off, nor the bees, so do we need to work every day,"* as Jiiji explained in one of the community meetings. In the past, new members joined the community after being introduced by mutual acquaintances or participating in the community's activities. Later, the main channel through which new members found out about the community was via its website on the internet.

Table 1: KH Members' Age and Gender (August 2021)

	Female child	Male child	Female adult	Male adult	Total
0-19	12	16	0	0	28
31-40	0	0	8	8	16
41-50	0	0	17	5	22
51-60	0	0	9	1	10
61-70	0	0	6	2	8
71-79	0	0	5	0	5
Total	12	16	45	16	89
	Total children: 28		**Total adults: 61**		

Around four years (no accurate date was provided) after the community was founded, they achieved self-sufficiency, which they claim to still have. Being successful in attaining self-sufficiency and cultivating microorganisms, the community started offering tours and workshops through which potential new members could be introduced. Through these tours and workshops, potential members, who had initially had an interest in the environmental aspects of the community, made the decision to join after being introduced not only to environmental practices but also to the values and life-purpose that the community was offering. These values and purpose, along with the reasoning and the logic behind them, were introduced by Jiiji, who is the only member of the community who is able to introduce new beliefs and

practices that are adopted by other members, and the only member who can dismiss them when he considers them to no longer be beneficial to KH. The reason no other member can do so is simply because only Jiiji is said to have the ability to communicate regularly with the divine.

The community welcomes guests who wish to stay in the Japanese countryside, practice agriculture, and participate in the community's activities. There are various kinds of guests, including volunteers, paid guests and care-guests, who are on the 'natural therapy program'. Beside the community's work, that volunteers and guests are welcome to participate in, including agricultural work, kitchen work and other community work, all guests are also encouraged to participate in the community meetings, lectures and day trips. The attitude of KH towards visitors is to expose them to the community life practiced by KH and encourage visitors to experience it first-hand. This encouragement consists of asking visitors to introduce themselves, participate in the meetings, comment, and share whatever is on their minds with the community. During community events, visitors are encouraged to make a presentation or a performance for the community, share their worldview and then receive comments from the members and from Jiiji. As the community is located in the remote countryside, visitors usually stay in KH's facilities during their entire stay and do not leave, including sleeping, eating and spending the rest of their free time. Therefore, the experience of community-life and interactions with members are important for visitors.

Except for the founding members, all members of KH were visitors before joining the community. This fact emphasizes the significance of visitors' impressions from their first visits, as they are potential future members. The values the community is said to be based upon is crucial not only in recruiting new members but also in attracting the visitors to come to the community in the first place. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how the community brands itself in order to attract visitors. To gain a better understanding of similar groups and grasp the context in which KH is operating, I will first introduce some types of groups and communes in Japan.

1.2. Ethnographic context

While no community is established in a social vacuum, knowing the historical, political and economic background of Japanese society in the time prior to and during KH's establishment is fundamental to understanding it, its success and the mindset of its members. Therefore, in this section, I aim to give a concise glimpse into the society KH took shape in.

1.2.1. Historical and societal context

The political and economic condition of Japan is clearly a significant factor influencing individuals to search for spiritual guidance. Prominent times for the flowering of new religions were after the Meiji restoration, during Japan's militarization in the 1920s and 1930s, at the end of World War II, and since the 1970s (Prohl, 2012), at a time of economic growth for Japan. Some NNR saw the "bubble economy" period as ultimate proof of Japan's superiority. Mahikari is one of these religions. It was first registered as Sūkyō Mahikari in 1978[2] and is based on the belief that this world is operating under spiritual influence, from which disease, unhappiness, and wars arise ("spiritual obstructions"). The members hold practices in which they "transmit the true light", which can heal people and transmit energy to improve this world and the people who live in it (Tsukada, 2012). One of the group's main missions is to train "seed people" (*tanebito* 種人*)* who will be able to be a part of the next civilization – the "spiritual civilization" that is soon to come. Although Mahikari doctrine highlights the role of the Japanese people in contributing spiritually to the world as a nation of "economic superpower" (Tsukada, 2012, 141), it became hard for the group to use the same justification in the 1990s. Hence, since that time, nationalistic statements have been missing from their teachings. The same is also true for Kōufuku no Kagaku, which has, since the 1990s, eliminated nationalistic features from their writing and focused on individual salvation.

While only a few studies have been done on spiritual and religious movements after the 1990s, It is generally agreed that the economic stagnation of Japan during the 1990s led to income insecurity, which in turn caused multiple social and mental instabilities, resulting in a high suicide rate (especially in men, see Yoshioka et al., 2016). This urged individuals to search for a new solution for their economic, social, personal, and mental problems. It would be easy to assume that at such a time of economic crisis, many Japanese would be consoled by a spiritual group that offered belief and community; however, this all changed in the mid-1990s. Following the terror attack of Aum Shinrikyō in 1995, new religions in Japan suffered from a negative image, regardless of their size (Prohl, 2012, 255). In a survey conducted on Japanese college students after the Aum incident, only twenty per cent responded positively to the question "do you believe in religion?" (Dorman, 2012). The public was skeptical of all religious organizations and questioned their intentions. New-New religions were about to encounter extreme difficulties recruiting new members and high levels of suspicion from public

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[2] For the history of the establishment of Sūkyō Mahikari, please refer to Tsukada 2012, p.138.

authorities. Yet the economic crisis continued, and while many people were looking for a spiritual answer to their difficulties, at a time when religions were no longer seen as reliable, some spiritual urges could not be satisfied. With public interest in spirituality high and trust in organized religion declining, the need for alternative spiritual guidance could now be fulfilled by a non-religious entity. The answer needed to be a spiritual establishment that offered non-religious spirituality that some members of the public were eager to consume.

With 60 to 70 per cent of the college students in the survey mentioned above claiming to believe in Shinto gods and goddesses, Buddha, spirits, souls, supernatural phenomena, destiny, and retribution for past deeds (Dorman, 2012, 514), yet in large part not defining themselves as religious, it is clear that there is a question surrounding the definition of religion and religious, be it in the form of an established religion such as Buddhism and Shinto, or a newer religious movements. Moreover, it is important to note that those who participate in non-religious new spirituality movements perceive religion as more restrictive, impersonal, and institutionalized (Shimazono & Graf, 2012, 484) and hence do not define themselves as a part of any religion. This seems to suggest that the religious groups of the new era might need to adjust their self-definition, to attract those who resist being a part of a religion and help them find a spiritual path to help with their hardships, as well as answer their spiritual questions, without giving them the sense that they participate in any form of religion. Although this may sound contradictory, some New-New religions use sophisticated terminology to make sense of such definitions and try to gain the attention of potential followers via means which are supposedly not related to purely "religious" beliefs.

1.2.2. Religion and identity in Japan

The official letter to the emperor by the first expedition of Matthew C. Perry back in 1953 contained the word "religion" twice, owing to the fact that the Americans wished to reassure the Japanese that they would respect the Japanese prohibition of Christianity (which ultimately was not enforced). The translators of the letter had a difficult time translating the term "religion", and various offers were made that each had a completely different meaning (Storm, 2012). The main takeaway from this incident is the fact that despite the existence of Shito and Buddhism in Japan prior to the arrival of the Black Ships (Western vessels arriving in Japan), the term "religion" in Japan was initially a foreign concept, and it continues to be so to this day. Shinto and Buddhism were not considered religions until Western societies started seeing them as such, and still, many Japanese who have faith in kami or Buddhist concepts,

and practice weddings, funerals, and visits to temples and shrines, are still reluctant to call these practices "religious". This attitude was also evident in the survey by Dorman (2012) presented above, where college students who declared they believe in divine entities would not define themselves as religious.

At the time of Tenrikyō and later Ōmotokyō, the term "religion" (宗教) was not used to define these groups, and their followers believed that they participated in the practices of a movement that held the ultimate truth, based on the familiar beliefs of Buddhism and Shinto, respectively. Even some of the new religious movements in Japan, such as Sūkyo Mahikari, refuse to see themselves as religions, as indicated by their name: in this example, Sūkyo (崇教) means "the universal principle", which ultimately tries to present Mahikari as the ultimate belief which transcends all others. Hence, it is important to note that although scholars might categorize these groups as new forms of religion, these groups do not necessarily define themselves as such, and their followers will not see themselves as being part of a religious group. However, these groups' beliefs in divine entities, supernatural phenomena, stories of the world's creation, and their practices of praying, chanting, and purification ceremonies indicate that they should be classified as religions.

As Japan was gaining its status as a global economy in the late 1960s and 1970s, a shift occurred in the way the Japanese consumed spirituality. From the late 1970s, spirituality gained popularity in Japan, and during the 1980s and 1990s, themes referring to the alteration of the mind and spirit as well as topics related to self-searching were gathered under the umbrella term The Spiritual World (*seishin sekai* 精神世界) (Shimazono & Graf, 2012, 460). One of the explanations offered for the growing interest in spirituality was the rising demand for knowledge and practices which are neither religious nor scientific (ibid, 477). By definition, religious organizations cannot fulfill this function. Some of the practices that were offered by writers of *the spiritual world* try to fill that gap with ideas of getting over the ego and initiation into organic agriculture. These ideas might have prepared the ground for the acceptance of New Age beliefs and new environmental ideologies or communal living with the aim of spiritual growth. Yet, the practices suggested by the spirituality of the 1970s and those introduced by New-New religions are somewhat similar in their focus on the individual and on transcending the ego. Therefore, it is hard to determine whether a given group is simply a spiritual group or rather a New-New Religion, merely by relying on the definition provided by its members.

1.2.3. Konohana Family: how the spiritual community operates

Although KH emphasizes that they are not a religious organization, their practices prove otherwise. Yet, although spirituality and spiritual practices have a significant role in the community's operation, KH is first and foremost a community and is subject to a certain lifestyle. Without understanding this, it is difficult to fully comprehend how other practices are undertaken in the community. Moreover, the fact that all members reside in the same location may also play a crucial part in preserving its membership and in the solutions offered by the community to potential members.

KH operates in two locations: Fujinomiya in Shizuoka Prefecture, which is the location that the community was first established in, and Ōmachi city in Nagano Prefecture, which is a branch operated by four people around eight months a year (in the snowy season, when they cannot grow crops, the members from Nagano live in Fujinomiya). The community in Nagano started when two people (at that time, not KH members) tried to start a self-sustaining agricultural initiative but faced fundamental difficulties. They were familiar with KH, whom they had previously visited, and eventually became members and made their agricultural initiative a branch of the community. Some members from Fujinomiya moved to Nagano and vice versa, and together they built a permanent branch of KH in Nagano. This thesis is based on fieldwork that was conducted only in Fujinomiya since the majority of members live there.

The community's facilities are not located one beside another but are scattered around a five square kilometer area (not including the Nagano branch), while the fields are spread over a wider area. There are four houses that KH members live in, in the Fujinomiya area: Hontaku (main house), Makoto's house (it bears this name despite the fact that there is nobody in the community that is called Makoto), Himawari (with its attached structure – KH Ann) and Yūsenkaku (see figure 1). Although there can be changes for various reasons, the members usually have a permanent room in one of the houses, which they share with one or two more members, adults or children. Usually, but not necessarily, members of the same gender are placed in the same room. The rooms and houses are said to be determined by necessity, according to the job of the person, or their spiritual or technical needs. The children live mainly in Hontaku and Himawari (there are only two children in Yūsenkaku), and the house they live in is decided by the school they attend. Generally, most of the young children (before junior high) live in Himawari, and the older ones live in Hontaku. There are roughly 29 members in Himawari (including members that sleep on the second floor of the KH guesthouse – KH Ann), 29 members in Hontaku, 15 members in Makoto's house, and 14 members in Yūsenkaku. Some

members moved rooms in the period that I stayed in the community, but overall, this is the ratio of members in the houses.

The community believes in the existence of Shinto gods and goddesses, and these spiritual entities actively communicate with Jiiji and his secretary, Yumi, through channeling. Jiiji is also believed to communicate with Buddha, and other deceased spiritual figures such as Miki Nakayama, Phumiphon Adunyadet and others. Yumi is believed to be a *miko*[3], who communicates mainly with Shinto gods and goddesses. As far as I heard, no other member is believed to have such spiritual abilities.

Figure 1: KH Members' Houses in Fujinomiya

As mentioned above, KH is a community that has set the aspiration of living as one big family, hence, many aspects of life are shared. Beside the houses and labor, it is said that nothing should belong to one member, and they are required to share everything they have; From a materialistic point of view, whenever a new member joins the community, they are asked to donate their money and assets to KH. Members with complicated situations (for example, one of the members has assets that are not only his but also his family's) consult with the community on how to manage these assets. Furthermore, equipment, materials and cars

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[3] Shinto Shaman woman.

that the community buys are assets of the community and do not belong to one person. The decision-making regarding such material issues as cars or asset-buying and management should be taken by the community as a collective after mutual consultation. Community members also state that some of these decisions are agreed on at a spiritual level, so there is no need for discussion. They repeatedly say that the necessary things will naturally happen.

Child-raising is also shared, and just as material objects are expected to be treated as communal property, adults and children should have no mutual attachments, even if they are biological parent and child. Attachment, KH members believe, is the cause of 21st-century society's problems, and once we release our attachments, we can be absolutely free. For that reason, the children in the community are raised as "everyone's children" without any special child-parent relationships. Community members are also encouraged to share personal experiences and thoughts, and they do so in the community meetings. In order to understand each other better, they claim it is necessary to be completely honest.

KH is fundamentally different from the general society it operates in – Japanese society. Therefore, joining the community is a fundamental shift in a member's life. The narratives that current members of the community shared with me pointed out their reasons for joining the community (as they analyze it from their current point of view) and what it was that enticed them to make that shift. Through their narratives, the story of the community's recruitment process emerged, as well as their perspectives on the future needs of the community in terms of recruiting new members.

This thesis discusses the Konohana Family Community and their ways of living as a collective while looking into their recruitment mechanisms. It is important to note that the story and personal narrative of each member is different, and throughout this thesis, I will treat every narrative with caution and refrain from confusion between describing a personal story and the way the community operates as a collective. Nevertheless, there are similarities between the family and life background of some of the members, as well as similarities in their perceptions of the recruitment process. While I describe this as a phenomenon, I refrain from making further generalizations.

2. Literature review

The integration between spiritual communities and environmentalism might seem loose as these are two different topics, yet the two are embedded in each other in philosophies and religious doctrines, and eventually this integration helps individuals make sense of their values, actions, and perception of the world. In the next few pages, a review over both spiritual communities, which will be represented by the word "religion" (an explanation why will follow), and environmentalism will be presented, and the overlaps between the two will be discussed. Apart from defining the concepts, their development, and the perception people have on them, the mechanism through which environmentalism can attract potential members to a given spiritual group, and sets as a precursor to a conversion process will be presented as well.

2.1. Religious recruitment

It is since the dawn of history that humans turned to different spiritual beliefs of different kinds, held practices based on these beliefs, and teams together to social groups based on it in different places of the world (Fasching, deChant, & Lantigua 2011). This highlights both needs, to gather individuals in one group, and hold to mutual beliefs that will help accomplish a mutual goal, which were both crucial for survival, yet are very well present these days too. An affiliation with a religious or spiritual group means, today, to be a part of a community that shares the same beliefs and - to some extent – lifestyle; however, many definitions to the word "religion" are introduced in the literature, with each putting the emphasis on different aspects of the phenomena.

2.1.1. "Religion" definition and function

The term "religion" describes a system of beliefs and practices concerning what is sacred or spiritual to a group of people (Durkheim & Wolff, 1964; Fasching, deChant, & Lantigua 2011). The meaning of the word also suggests that the ultimate goal of religion is to combine a group of people together, as "religare" in Latin is *to bind* and "religio" means *obligation, bond, reverence*. From the dawn of history, civilizations around the world developed religions that were practiced not only via beliefs and practices, but also through symbols, traditions, and narratives, all in an attempt to live meaningful life and to understand how the universe operates (Dawson & Thiessen, 2014). Religion was found in every form of culture, and it is most common to be practiced publicly.

There are three ways to define religion in social scholarship: substantial definitions, functional definitions, and family resemblance definitions, which all explains religion a little differently (Dawson & Thiessen, 2014). The substantial definition tries to delineate the crucial characteristics that define what a religion is. One of the prominent examples are of Sir Edward Tylor that argued: "a minimum definition of Religion [is] the belief in spiritual beings" (Tylor, 1871, in Stark, 1999, p. 268), and Sir James Frazer to whom "religion consists of two elements… a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or appease them" (Frazer, 1922, in Stark, p. 268). The common denominator of these definitions is the strong presence of the characteristic "belief in the supernatural" that they emphasize. Yet the limitation of the substantial definitions is that they are utterly limiting and narrow: Tylor and Frazer definitions, emphasis on the belief in the supernatural excludes religions such as Theravadan Buddhism, Confucianism, and neo-paganism, in which the borders between the holy or sacred, and humans or earthy are not as defined as they are in the West.

Functional definitions define religion by its functionality in society. Milton Yinger's definition is: "Religion is a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group struggles with the ultimate problems of human life" (Yinger, 1970, in Dawson & Thiessen, 2014), while Mark Taylor's definition is: "an emergent, complex, adaptive network of symbols, myths, and rituals that, on the one hand, figure schemata of feeling, thinking, and acting in ways that lend life meaning and purpose and, on the other, disrupt, dislocate, and disfigure every stabilizing structure" (Taylor, 2007). These definitions better capture different kinds of religions, yet their weakness is in the fact they are too inclusive, making it difficult to distinguish religion from non-religion.

To tackle the last question, the third type of definition to religion was introduced: the family resemblance model. In this model, religion is defined on the basis of a series of commonly shared attributes (Dawson & Thiessen, 2014). This definition is based on the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's ordinary language definition of games (Wittgenstein, 1958). The idea behind this definition, is to think of religions in categories, just as we would with games: although it might be difficult to decide precisely and logically what the rule is that subsumes tiddlywinks, solitaire, Dungeons and Dragons, and ice hockey under the category "games", we still do put them under this category. Under this sense, the family resemblance model defines a complex concept like religion by listing a cluster of related attributes that are distinctive yet shared in common by different versions of different manifestations of this concept, while noting that not every version of it will have all of the attributes. The name comes

from the notion that a family shares some physiological traits, which can be used to distinguish them from other families, even though each family member is unique.

Other definitions of religion include the four dimensions that seem to be present, in some way, in all types of religion: belief, ritual, spiritual experience, and unique social forms of community (Dawson & Thiessen, 2014). Religious beliefs are a system of ideas and values that help shape how members understand the world. These beliefs are taught to followers by religious authorities, such as priests, clerics, or shamans, through formal faith and doctrines, as well as informal lessons learned through songs, stories, and myths. The faith outlines the basic principles and beliefs of a religion, which are used in ceremonies as a formal statement of belief, and the same belief system provides people with a coping strategy to cope with ultimate questions that cannot be explained in any other way (Knowles, 2006). The ritual dimension functions to preserve religious beliefs. These are the repeated physical gestures or activities, such as chanting and prayers, used to reinforce religious teachings, elicit spiritual feelings, and connect worshippers with a higher power, and reinforce the division between the sacred and the profane by defining a line between the two. Rituals can be daily, yearly, and sometimes held only once in a lifetime. Rituals play an important psychological role in providing practitioners with access to spiritual powers, relieve anxieties, or heal (Reader, 1991). In contrast, it is important to note that rituals can also be used to create anxieties that keep people in line with established norms.

The third dimension of religions is the promise of access to some form of unique spiritual experience or feeling of connection with a higher power, like god or the divine. From this perspective, religion is not merely about thinking a certain way (i.e., a formal belief system), but about feeling a certain way. These experiences with higher power can come in several forms: visions or revelations of divine beings, communicating with spirits through the altered states of consciousness, or the unique experiences of expanded consciousness accessed by individuals through prayer or meditation (ibid). Finally, the fourth dimension of religion is the formation of specific forms of social organization or community. Durkheim (1964) claimed that religious beliefs and practices "unite in one single community called a Church, all those who adhere to them," and argued that one of the key social functions of religion is to bring people together in a unified moral community.

Researchers who expanded this notion are Dawson and Thiessen (2014), who elaborate on the social dimension and claim it is shared by all religions. First, the beliefs of a religion gain their credibility through being shared and agreed upon by a group, and then, religion provides a framework that deals with social or moral issues. Religion provides a basis for ethics

and proper behaviors which establish the normative basis of the community. Religion is also a form of social control as it helps to shape different aspects of social life, by acting as a formation of self-control which is vital to maintain a functional society. By looking at religions in terms of the four dimensions, belief, ritual, experience, and community, sociologists identify the important characteristics they share while taking into consideration and allowing for the great diversity of the world religions.

2.1.2. New Religious Movement conversion

New Religious Movement (NRM) are religious organizations that differ from the norms and values of the larger society. Many of them rely on charismatic leadership based on extraordinary personal qualities. Many of the major world religions, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, and smaller groups such as the Mormons all began as religious movements, and they were all new when they began. Yet while the processes through which conversion into the world's large and well-known religions was excessively studied, conversion into membership of NRMs have fewer frameworks and research on this realm, especially in Japan, is limited. Therefore, to better understand the process which members go through in their process of conversion and values shift in the Japanese arena, a Western framework will be used.

One of the most prominent frameworks to understand NRM conversion is the one framed by John Lofland and Rodney Stark (Lofland &Stark, 1965). This model is based on a field research into what was then a small and obscure deviant religion dubbed the 'Divine Precepts'. The group was later on known as the Unification Church, or the Moonies. By observing the attempts made at recruitment, Lofland and Stark formulated a seven-step model of the process of conversion. This model stipulates that for persons to convert to a spiritual group they must (1) experience enduring, acutely felt tensions in their lives, (2) within a religious problem-solving perspective (as opposed to a psychiatric or political problem-solving perspective), (3) which leads them to think of themselves as a religious seeker. Then, when the three predisposing conditions are established, the individual must (4) encounter the spiritual group to which they convert at a turning point in their lives, (5) form an affective bond with one or more members of the group, (6) reduce or eliminate external (out of the group) attachments and (7) be exposed to intensive interaction with other converts. Once completing the later four stages, which are referred as 'situational contingencies,' the new convert can become a 'deployable agent' of the group. Lofland and Stark believed that the cumulative effect of all of these experiences produces a true conversion. Each step is necessary, but only the whole process is sufficient to produce a 'total convert.'

This model was tested repeatedly over the years, in different contexts, with mixed results. In the study of a quite large NRM imported to America from Japan, Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism (also known as Soka Gakkai), David Snow and Cynthia Phillips (Snow & Phillips, 1980) found the model conceptually and empirically lacking in most of its stages. Arthur Greil and David Rudy (Greil & Rudy, 1984), arrived at a similar conclusion after inspecting the data on conversion available from ten case studies of widely divergent NRMs. Yet other researchers, such as Merrill Singer (1988) found most aspects of the model to be relevant with the sect Black Hebrew Nation, while others found it largely compatible to their findings on Dutch adolescents who had converted to either the Unification Church or the Pentecost Church (Kox, Meeus, & Hart, 1991).

Debate over the theory expanded with clashes of opinion over various aspects of the model. Snow & Phillips (1980), who studied Nichiren Shōshū in America, are quite dismissive of two aspects of Lofland & Stark's model. They reject the claims that potential converts must experience enduring and claim that they acutely felt tension and some 'turning point' in their lives (failing out of school, divorce, etc.) A different study of Nichiren Shōshū in Britain, found that many members claim they experienced chronic or acute crises in their lives and a turning point (Wilson & Dobbelaere, 1988). These kinds of divergent results suggest that the steps outlined by the Lofland & Stark model cannot represent an integrated and cumulative model of the actual process of conversion as a fairly adequate statement of some of the key 'conditions' of conversion.

Although Lofland & Stark's model indeed raises a debate among many researchers of NRMs, it is agreed that some of the 'conditions' they noted for conversion are indeed repeating in different spiritual groups. The step that was found in various studies is (3) think of themselves as a religious seeker. This 'seekership', is the active search for religious answers to one's problems. Although it was not found present in any NRMs studies, it does precede many conversions. Individuals inclined to be interested in even the possibility of joining an NRM have been reading related philosophical and religious literature and tended repeatedly think of the so-called 'big questions' (e.g. The meaning of life? Is there a higher god or spirit? Is there life after death?), as seen in the works on Hare Krishna (Rochford, 2007), Nichiren Shōshū (Wilson & Dobbelaere, 1988) and Church of Universal and Triumphant (Jones, 2008).

Another step that was repeatedly found relevant is number (5): form an affective bond with one or more members of the group. Many studies of conversion and of specific groups have found that recruitment to NRMs occur primarily through preexisting social networks and interpersonal bonds: friends, family members, and neighbors (Barker, 1999; Wilson &

Dobbelaere, 1998; Singer, 1988). In Wilson & Dobbelaere findings of Nichiren Shōshū in Britain, over a third of their respondents stressed 'the quality of the membership' as the primary reason for their primary attraction to the group. It was even further strengthened by Janet Jacobs (1987) who discovered that a perceived loss of such intensive interaction often plays a key role in the deconversion of members of NRMs.

One more step which is present in NRMs conversion studies is number (6): reduce or eliminate external attachments. It was evident that high NRM involvement was strongly correlated with having fewer and weaker extra-group social ties (Lewis, 2009; Parachini, 2005; Snow & Phillips, 1980). Reversely, if there is a pronounced difference between the orientation and activities of the new religion and the family and friends of the recruit, as in the case of Krishna Consciousness (Nye, 2012), then the weakening of prior ties plays a more crucial role in the conversion process. This could be a strategy to reduce stigmas in the eyes of the members, who might have heard about the group's stigma by the external society. This may also be induced by the extent to which a group claims and insists it has the exclusive path to truth and salvation. The more particularistic and esoteric a religion is, the more it will demand a sharp separation from the world and from the convert's past social and ideological attachments.

Throughout the time, other factors were added to Lofland & Stark's model. One factor is the notion that recruitment can be influenced by the degree and type of hostility to the NRMs that is present in the dominant culture, the presence or absence of missionaries and the presence of competitor groups. Contrasting Japan and the United States, Wilson (1979) pointes that it is better to be careful not to assume that new religions fulfill the same function in different cultural and historical circumstances. To the convert, it often seems miraculous that a representative of a new religion happens to be at hand at the crucial moment of crisis or decision in their lives. In the case when other similar kinds of groups, competitor religions or functional equivalents to religion (e.g. therapy group, political movement, or idealistic social organization) are present instead, then the conversion in question might not happen.

Wilson also stressed that we must consider "that, in some measure, movements may awaken needs in particular individuals, giving them increased specificity in the terms of the movement's own ideology, and so defining the situation for prospective adherents, supplying both the sense of needs and the means of its fulfillment" (Wilson, 1979, p.208). Therefore, it is also important to remember that religions, similarly to commercial enterprises, can raise consciousness about needs and their satisfaction which their members did not think of. Then, NRMs provide 'direct rewards' to their members, such as self-esteem, esoteric and exoteric knowledge that provides a sense of power and control over one's life, as well as simple, material

and social aid, security, new career opportunities and forms of prestige (Wallis, 2019). These rewards of participating in the new reality constructed by the group may become more important than simply satisfying 'the ends such participation was originally intended to procure'.

2.1.3. New Religious Movements in Japan

When discussing the Japanese context, we must acknowledge the fundamental difference between such movements in Japan and New Religions in other parts of the world. In Japanese society, which is known for combining various practices, rituals, and teachings, derived from Buddhism, Shinto, and folk religions, combining a few beliefs into one doctrine did not seem as radical as it could be seen in the West. This setting explains the pluralism of new religions in Japan and the tolerance toward groups that might be condemned in other countries. Beside the hybridity and the new interpretations of existing religions, there are other features that new religious groups have in common. One of the characteristics that differentiates new religions from traditional ones is the focus on this-worldly benefits, as opposed to seeking salvation in death or the afterlife. To deal with illness, poverty, dissatisfaction, and loneliness, a religious group offers practical solutions, such as prayer, devotion, and physical solutions, such as the transmission of divine light and magical rituals. As a part of this-worldly benefits, these groups also aspire to make fundamental shifts in society and transform the world (*yonaoshi*). Some groups, including Soka Gakkai and Ōmoto-Kyō, try to achieve this goal through political reforms, while others try to achieve it by creating a commune or organization that they hope will instigate change from the bottom-up, while having faith that more followers will join as they see that the utopia created by the commune is the ultimate way to live. The utopian notion of such groups comes from the belief that the new religion is based on harmony between all living things and that it will serve as a community in times when intimate social relations in general society have been reduced, or, for some people, are completely missing. One more aspect of the utopian worldview is equality between all members, regardless of their social or economic status. Most commonly, differential treatment between members depends on the quality of their work and contributions to the group, not their family history or their assets.

Although new interpretations of existing religions are as old as Jōdo-shū in the 12th century and Nichiren in the 13th century, and some even claim the Nyōraikyō in the 9th century as such, scholars identify Japanese groups emerging from the end of the 19th century as New Religions or New Religious Movements. It is agreed that there are four major periods of

establishment of new religious movements (Shimazono, 2004, 230). The first lasted until the end of the 19th century (early Meiji Era). At that time, groups such as Tenrikyō, Konkōkyō, and Honmon Butsurūshū achieved rapid growth. Profound lifestyle changes for the Japanese during this time of rapid modernization, urbanization, and industrialization led many people to search for a community that would provide comfort and stability in a constantly changing world. The second period was from the late Meiji to the early Taisho era, in the time of political instability that followed the first Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War. These circumstances provided the backdrop against which new religious movements offered spiritual and practical solutions to people's everyday problems. One of the most recognized NRM of that time was Ōmoto-kyō. The third period was from 1926 to the mid-1970s, but in fact, as all religions other than State Shinto were oppressed during the Second World War, most of the NRM in the third period emerged after the war was over. At the end of the war, there were many reasons for people to turn to religion for comfort and economic help: families who had lost their loved ones in the war were looking for faith to handle their grief, poor economic conditions urged people toward communities that could help them, and changes made in Japanese society, led by the American occupation, pushed people to seek a stable community with familiar traditions. Religions could now attract new members, offer stability and answer spiritual questions while offering a community for those who were struggling. The new constitution defending the freedom of religion also contributed to the flourishing of new religions after the war. Although most of the religions that sprouted in that period were short-lived, some eventually prospered, as illustrated by Sekai Kyūseikyō and Sōka Gakkai. Finally, the fourth period of NRM started during the 1970s. As the new groups that emerged in this period are highly distinguishable from the preceding new religions, they were named Neo-New religions or New-New religions (NNR) by Nishiyama Shigeru in 1979, and this idea was later developed by Shimazono Susumu (Tsukada, 2012, 135). These groups differ from their predecessors in terms of their hybrid teachings derived from existing religions, as well as their concept of 'the spiritual world', a focus on this-worldly benefits, and practices of "reformation of the heart/mind" (*kokoronaoshi* 心直し) (Prohl, 2012, 247).

The first and most prominent feature of the NNR is to pursue not only this-worldly benefits but a satisfactory meaningful life. It is said that as the Japanese have shifted their goals in life, new religious groups have offered modified aspirations to their followers (Shimazono, 2004, 233). Personal inner fulfillment was in-demand, so NNR adjusted their teachings and highlighted individual experiences as opposed to group benefits, as did NRM. Rituals that aim

to improve the world through individual practice are common in NNR and can be seen in Agonshū (Reader, 1988, 256), and both Sukyō Mahikari and Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan that strive for an individually-based salvation (Tsukada, 2012, 143). Indeed, the individual is at the center in NNR doctrines, as mentioned in Prohl (2012), but unlike spirituality per se, in NNR, the group is the means through which the individual is improved, whether it is by spiritual guidance, work, ceremonies, or other practices. Another prominent element of NNR is Japanese centralism and nationalism, according to which Japanese people will establish the desired utopian society, as it is they who are designated to do so by divine authority. It is the Japanese people's responsibility to spread this important *truth* to the world, and hence their role is fundamental in creating the aspiration for Heaven on Earth.

Although all members of each NNR group are required to serve as ambassadors of the group they belong to, it is common that very few are in charge of new-member recruitment. Often, NNR have one leader in whose hands rests all authority, as opposed to the delegation of power and authority in NRM. When a new member is in the process of making the decision about whether to join the group or not, in many cases, the decision is made after conversing with the group's leader. Hence, the leader has a major responsibility for the recruitment of new members. The person leading the group usually has distinguishing characteristics and is the central axis of the group itself.

2.1.4. Community leaders and followers

Many explanations are offered as to why individuals are induced to live in a given community. It might be argued that the principal reason for members to join a certain group or community is not only the interest in community life or the values that the community holds, but the change they hope to go through by joining the community. The change might be practicing the values they believe in, communal living in a place where social relations are being practiced in various ways on a daily basis, or a combination of both, among other reasons. In previous studies of members of religious groups, one of the noticeable elements in members' narratives is the change *they* went through in their social settings after joining the community or group (Swift, 2012; Garden, 2006; Saunders, 1995). In order to believe that joining a given community will make a difference in their lives, such a message needs to be conveyed by a trusted figure. But what makes a figure trustworthy to the extent of convincing individuals to follow a new set of beliefs and practices that will affect almost every aspect of their lives? How can this trusted figure make individuals perform actions they never thought they would? The

answer can only come through examining community leaders; many of them have a similar operating system for attracting new members.

One of the most memorable Japanese NNR leaders is Shoko Asahara, as he led his group to develop weapons, commit murder, and harm innocent civilians in the name of their faith, and was eventually executed by hanging in 2018 after he was sentenced to death for his crimes. His NNR, Aum Shinrikyō, which was established in the 1980s (Parachini, 2005), was based on a philosophy that combined elements of Buddhism, Hinduism, some science, Nostradamus, and millennialism. Asahara was considered by his followers to be a messenger of the divine and sometimes a living god. In the early years, the group attracted members mainly by offering yoga meditation practices, yet only ten years later they had developed chemical weapons and conducted their notorious terrorist attack in the Tokyo subway in March 1995. Asahara was described as Aum's charismatic spiritual guru, and he stood alone at the pinnacle of the organization. The members had different ranks, and the highest rank was a small group composed of those who were closest to Asahara and, together with him, were in charge of the management of the NNR; however, all members were subordinate only to Asahara. Members were able to ascend the religious ranks by participating in particular training programs and donating money. To join the highest rank, members had to be completely detached from their previous life, cutting contact with their families and giving all their material assets to the organization (ibid). The group attracted new members in Japan, as well as in other countries, though in Japan, it mostly appealed to youngsters who craved personal and spiritual fulfillment. One member said that "everyone in Aum was aiming for the same thing – raising their spiritual level – so we had a lot in common" (Murakami, 2000, p.250, in Parachini, 2005).

While Asahara's leadership was totalitarian, the totality of the devotion towards him was also the group's weakness: Aum's operations were never questioned, causing an "echo-chamber" effect (ibid, p.17), in which members never questioned the practices that were later strongly criticized and condemned. Asahara's commands were not questioned, and even when he commanded members to commit murder, they blindly obeyed. They were willing to do whatever he said, including killing other Aum members, for the sake of proceeding with Asaraha's divine purpose: killing in order to "liberate" the victim from a corrupted earthly life. Having Asahara's divine righteousness as an unquestionable justification gave him ultimate legitimacy and members followed his every order, even preventing law enforcement from impeding Aum's activities. When Asahara or the group's survival was at risk, members would do anything he said to continue Aum's divine mission. However, after Asahara's arrest, some

members admitted that they had feared being punished for not obeying him (ibid, p. 33). Parachini (2005) described some of the activities of Aum members as "incredibly naïve", as they believed that the rightness of their mission would guard them from the authorities (p. 23). However, the process by which members transformed from ordinary people into so-called naïve followers would be impossible without an authority that backed them up and justified their hideous acts. Later, it would be hard for them to recall that, initially, they believed they were only raising their spiritual level and helping others to do the same. However, raising spirituality is a common bait to stimulate the interest of potential members, and Aum Shinrikyō is not the only group to have used it.

In Kōfuku no Kagaku, for example, the founder, Ōkawa Ryūhō, preached a form of individual spiritual improvement called *kokoro naoshi* (心直し), that could be attained through daily practices. Salvation, in this regard, is obtained only at the level of the individual. Kōfuku no Kagaku was founded in 1986 following Ōkawa's claim that he had started receiving sacred messages from divine spirits five years prior. These spirits included Nichiren, Christ, Amaterasu Ōmikami, Confucius, and leaders of other religious groups (Tsukada, 2012, p.144). Kōfuku no Kagaku expanded rapidly in the early 1990s, a time when the group had shifted from nationalistic doctrines to promoting *kokoro naoshi*. Ōkawa himself was said to be an incarnation of El Cantre, who was previously incarnated as Sākyamuni and Hermes (Tsukada, 2012), and he conveyed the messages he claimed to have received from the divine in the more than 300 books he published. However, that alone was not what attracted new members to become his followers; Ōkawa emphasized positive thinking and self-help to promote success and happiness in life, out of a professed belief in the goodness of human nature (ibid, 144). To achieve these goals, Ōkawa first set the spotlight on what the Japanese people needed to do, and later on, the responsibility which he claimed was distributed to each individual.

There are numerous examples of NNR leaders, but these two examples serve to illustrate some of the traits these leaders have in common. The most distinguishing feature is the belief that they are messengers of the divine. This makes a leader unquestionable, as they represent a supernatural authority that no other living being can dispute. Another prominent characteristic is the leader's charisma which potential members (and current members) are enchanted by. The speeches and the arguments that the leader makes are supported by their confidence, which makes them appear to be someone the members can trust and follow. Almost all leaders of NNR also claim that the group which they lead is the ultimate group to be a part of and no other groups are genuine or trustworthy. By this practice, they elevate their value in

the eyes of those who have faith in them, making the NNR they run the "ultimate" setting to live in and live by. The totalitarian approach is also crucial; the only authority in the religion is the leader, who will always make the final decisions. The NNR has no management or administration formed of members whose opinions and suggestions are equal to those of the leader, and the power to make decisions is the leader's alone. There are ranks, and sometimes – as in the case of Aum Shinrikyō – fear of the consequences of not conforming, and members stay loyal to the leader, as he or she is the only authority who communicates with the divine. It would be fair to say then that the leader has an essential role in the NNR, and is not only in charge of the formation of the group but also of the loyalty of current members, and has a significant responsibility in persuading new members to join. However, his persuasion is reinforced by the attitude of current members, and therefore leaders need to provide guidance for members on how to handle potential members. Hence, current members of NNR are also important players when persuading new members to join the group.

Members of NNR, like those of any other religious organization, have been through a conversion process. The only exceptions are those who were born into such groups and have continuously lived under such beliefs. The process of conversion requires three steps: the awakening of faith, its establishment, and further strengthening of the beliefs (Shimazono, 1986). After joining the group, members feel an obligation toward it, and their efforts to act for the sake of the group at every given opportunity can elevate their status in the NNR, but more importantly, enhance their identification with the group. As previously noted, in NNR, it is not the economic status, age, or family the members came from that is significant, but the contribution of the members to the community. As the size of the NNR is what makes it stronger, richer, more productive, acceptable, and appealing to potential members, one of the biggest missions of current members is to help recruit new members to the group.

It is difficult to discern whether current members have a spoken or written set of rules that they operate by in order to recruit new members, or whether they act in ways that will make visitors and potential members feel welcome, comfortable and make the community appealing without receiving any specific guidelines. However, some practices that have been noted in various NNR seem like well-oiled mechanisms to attract individuals who might be interested in the group. One of the examples seen often in Japanese NNR is when current members say to visitors or participants in their events *okaerinasai* (welcome back). This has been documented in Agonshū, Tenrikyō, and Shinnyoen. The explanation given is that this phrase should make visitors feel as if they have come back home, not only physically but also in the sense of returning to the original belief (Reader, 1988, 239). Also, members often

volunteer information about the positive changes that they have been through since joining the community and how life was unfulfilling and meaningless before.

The narratives of current members are, in fact, crucial to understanding their standpoint. The stories of current members often refer to a miserable prior life, a crisis, an encounter with the NNR, joining and then starting to have a meaningful life. The story often includes the direct influence of the group's leader, whether in person, through hearing a lecture, reading his or her book, or any kind of encounter with the leader's ideas and philosophy. In this regard, it does not make any difference if the leader (often the founding member as opposed to the current leader) is alive or dead. When current members explain how the leader and their philosophy and way of life changed their lives for the best, it gives potential members a goal to aspire to and hope that whatever problems they might be facing can be solved by a certain lifestyle. Thus, for potential members, the ideas of the NNR, even NNR which may look radical, appear less frightening, as they meet many people already living in these settings who claim to have fulfilling lives.

As much as the pull factors of the NNR may look appealing, the leader convincing, and the members engaged and happy, the current condition of the potential member and the difficulties they face at the time they encounter the NNR have great influence over their decision to join or not join. These potential members need to want a change in their lives before joining the given NNR. Otherwise, even a charismatic leader and wide social acceptance will not compel them to join the group. Therefore, it is important to look into the external conditions which members are surrounded and affected by and examine their contribution to the decision to join a given NNR. Nowadays, more evidence about environmental concerns in Japan is rising, and discussion about climate change, SDGs and sustainable living is often present in the media. With this understanding, and while many of the NNR suggest environmental solutions to their members and followers, it is important to look into the environmental awareness, movement, and concern when attempting to analyze the reason individuals join NNRs. Yet first, it is crucial to start with a fundamental understanding of what environmentalism is.

2.2 Environmentalism

Understanding and examining the will, initiations, or historical footprint of nature conservation, requires an examination of the concept of nature. The word "nature" itself is not straight-forward and can be interpreted differently by different cultures, and even have different interpretations by people of the same culture (Castree, 2001). As literary critic

Raymond Williams claimed, the word "nature": "is perhaps the most complex word in the [English] language" (Williams, 1983, p. 219). In fact, William identified three meaning to the word: (i) the essential quality and character of something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; and (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings (ibid). Yet the Japanese understanding of the word "nature" (in Japanese *shizen* or *jizen*) is somewhat different. It expresses naturalness that changes over time, and not the objective material world which exists alongside – or sometimes in opposition – to the subjective world of humans, art and culture (Tucker, 2003). Therefore, when looking into nature conservation, one must be familiar with the perceptions of nature itself in the eyes of the conserver.

In 17th and 18th centuries Europe, the wilderness represented "Satan's home to be redeemed by improvement and agricultural cultivation" and the practice of agriculture and restraining nature by humans was appreciated as mark of civilization and a recognition of progress (Demeritt, 2001, p. 24; Pepper, 1984, p. 79). It was in the 19th century that concerns regarding loss of wilderness were growing rapidly, and eventually led to the establishment of the National Parks movement, which was inspired by Henry David Thoreau's phrase "In wildness is the preservation of the world", a phrase he borrowed from the philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (Pepper, 1984, p. 82; Giddens, 2015). Later on, The call for nature conservation in the west started as early as Aldo Leopold's ideas of environmental ethics and call for wilderness conservation in the first half of the 20th century. Yet scientific knowledge about the degradation of the natural environment was gathered more extensively during the 1960s and 1970s, and scientists and intellectuals raised a concern regarding the heavy pollution that the Earth might not be able to absorb anymore due to increasing human economic activity (Sessions, 2009). This concern made a fertile ground for activists who advocated to consider all living things and not only humans in the fields of politics, economics, and social activities. This was the beginning of environmental activism which took place in the forms of environmental non-governmental organizations and the formation of environmental ("green") political parties in a number of Western democracies (Britannica, 2021).

Overall, environmentalism seeks to protect the natural environment as well as improve its quality by changing harmful human practices, and improve the relationship between humans and nature, as environmentalists believe that human lives are not superior to other forms of life. Therefore, they advocate for a political, economic, and social consideration in nature. Some, who wish to change their entire lifestyle in order to solve environmental problems, may also

do so by initiating a community that will be a designated place to practice environmentalism and it would be its core value.

2.2.1. Intentional communities

The term "intentional community" is used to refer to people sharing the same social, spiritual or political vision who deliberately choose to live in the same locality in order to establish mutual life. Christian (2007), citing Metcalf (2004, in Christian, 2007), claims that "…intentional communities are formed when people choose to live with or near enough to each other to carry out a shared lifestyle, within a shared culture and with a common purpose" (ibid, p. xviii). The notion is that sharing the same beliefs facilitates sharing the same resources and responsibilities as can be seen in the Kibbutz, ecovillages (Sargent, 2013) and some spiritual communities. An intentional community is expected to meet the needs that the community where one was born to not fulfill. Although these needs might be varied, the common denominator is that they represent deficiencies in the community that the person used to belong to. Despite the fact that many intentional communities are in a particular locality, other kinds of intentional communities, such as New-Age, New-religions, socialist and environmental movements, may not operate from one place, yet they still meet some of the needs that their members have been looking for.

One of the desired values that is allegedly revived in intentional communities is human connectivity, manifested through mutual life and personal ties, a value that is said to have been abandoned in modern and post-modern society. In the nineteenth century, Tönnies (2005) suggested a pair of concepts to describe social ties, contributing the terms Gemeinschaft, which refers to a community based on personal social interactions conducted by people that share the same locality, and Gesellschaft, which means a society or association that holds indirect interactions, along with formal values, based on interests. According to Tönnies, it was modernization that changed the nature of social ties. It is argued that some intentional communities that operate in a single location try to revive the Gemeinschaft and create a pre-modern type of community. This might be the reason that many intentional communities base their economies on agriculture and personal interaction, as pre-modern communities used to. However, it would be wrong to state that all intentional communities were established in the search for mutual personal ties alone. The fundamental reasons for establishing new communities are varied and differ from group to group, and new intentional communities can suggest multiple solutions, including national, spiritual or environmental needs. The essence of a group and its declared common purpose are the reasons why new members seek to join

and become a part of them. Therefore, it is important to analyze carefully the foundations that an intentional community has been built upon, as well as the way they appeal to individuals who are not a part of them. These fundamental values might form the motivation for non-members to find interest in becoming a member of such a group.

While every community has its ideas and methods to encourage new members to join it, external factors can enhance their appeal. For instance, socialism at the end of the 19th century gave rise to Zionism, which drove eager Russian-Jewish pioneers to bring their ideology to life by establishing secular Jewish communities in the land of Palestine (Spiro, 1956). Their dream was to revive a national home for the Jewish people, and they achieved it by establishing Kibbutz communities, based on the Kibbutz Ideology that was established in 1910. The Kibbutz was a community where everything had to be shared, the main principles of which were: (1) members live on and make their living from the land; (2) property is collectively owned; (3) goods and services are distributed according to needs; (4) luxurious living is eschewed; and (5) equality is the dominant mode of social relations (Spiro, 2004, 557). As these principles are somewhat extreme and were foreign to Kibbutz members prior to their membership, they were drawn to believe that this was the best way for living by the social climate of socialism that flourished at that time and the strong Zionist ideology the Kibbutz intended to revive.

Another example of external circumstances that enhance the pull factors of a given community is the Yamagishi movement in Japan. In the mid-1950s, a movement calling for spiritual practices and minimal possessions developed in Japan. The movement, which initially started as a chicken raising method, was named after its founder, Miyozo Yamagishi, who claimed that in order to attain happiness, community members should satisfy all their needs through agricultural work, a simple lifestyle, and sharing all financial possessions (Spiri, 2008). Once they have joined the community, members are asked to cede their possessions, at least partially, and contribute to the community according to their ability. The movement expanded beyond Japan's borders and now operates in Australia, Brazil, and the United States, as well as a few other countries (Trahair, 1999). The ultimate goal and ideals of the movement are said to create a prevailing change in society (Spiri, 2008).

A large upsurge of the Yamagishi movement happened in the 1960s when student political movements flourished (according to Brumann in Christensen & Levinson, 2003). The founder, Yamagishi, attracted new members through an ideology that resonated with the worldview of many Japanese who no longer trusted the current democratic political and economic system. His way of attracting new members was through agriculture: when peasants

came to learn his new chicken-raising methods, he introduced them to his philosophical ideas, called "Kensan" (Trahair, 1999). He combined various philosophies, such as Zen Buddhism, Marxism, and anarchism, and preached to visitors who came to learn new agricultural techniques. His philosophy discussed anger management, the unity of society, aspects of the individual's spirit and body, sharing property and the practice of all these ideas. In the beginning, community members were considered to be one large family, while the agricultural work, child-rearing, bathhouses, and living houses were all shared. Slowly the movement grew bigger and spread to various locations in Japan and worldwide. Indeed, the living environment that is seen in the Yamagishi economic system, including its child-raising methods, and agricultural-based economy, in large part mirrors that of the Kibbutz and has even been described as a 'Kibbutzlike commune' (Trahair, 1999, p.448-449). However, the ideology and social climate were different. While Kibbutz ideology supports consensus-based decision-making and living collectively for national purposes, the Yamagishi had a leader who was establishing the community and making decisions for others for spiritual reasons.

While the ideologies of both the Kibbutz and Yamagishi are derived from their local influences, respectively, some intentional communities are fueled by global movements. Ecovillages are among such examples. The ideology of ecovillages is based on a form of environmentalism, which claims that a change is needed in order to heal and preserve the global environment. The Environmental Movement, which is illustrated by many ecovillages, emerged in the second half of the 20th century and represents resistance to massive destruction of the environment by humankind (Kasper, 2008). This movement promotes activities that might lead to legislation and policy change to protect the natural environment and encourage making changes in the realms of technology, energy usage, and production (Martell, 1994). In a time of climate change and massive destruction of the natural environment, some individuals who want to take an active part in the environmental movement resort to ecovillages, which offer communal living that strives to reduce the ecological footprint of its members (Jackson, 2004). Ultimately, the ecovillages intend to be self-sufficient in terms of food, manufacturing, leisure, commerce and social opportunities, while maintaining activities that do not harm human health or the natural surroundings (Kasper, 2008). The concept of the 'ecovillage' was introduced in the 1990s, and in the early 2000s, it was estimated that there were 4,000-15,000 ecovillages worldwide (Jackson, 2004). The fundamental characteristics of an ecovillage, according to the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), are conscious, sustainable activities as part of an effort to create a strong sense of human community, and these are the ambitions that ecovillages strive to achieve through their workshops and activities. Hence, ecovillages show

the way in which a community's pull factors operate together with international-social push factors to draw new members to the community, while the ultimate goal of members is to break through the limitations imposed by their previous lifestyle and to create a life where they feel free to live under the values they believe in.

Freedom is also crucial when discussing intentional communities, although its coverage in the literature is scarce. It is argued that this is the main reason why members join: to achieve freedom in the matters which are most important to them. When convinced that the intentional community will serve their pursuit of freedom, they are willing to join and commit themselves to it. As the intentional community sociologist, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, stated back in the 1970s: "[the new group is] identifiable as an entity […] and a way of distinguishing between members and nonmembers. It intentionally implements a set of values. […] Because members choose to remain, conformity within the community is based on commitment […] rather than on force or correction" (Kanter, 1972, p. 2-3). Kanter focuses on the notion that the existence of a community depends on the commitment of its members. Hence, the aspiration should always be to attract potential members who will adopt the community's rules and guidelines and will conform to the basic norms. Otherwise, the community might attract members who are not appropriate and who might break the community rules, imposing a burden on themselves or the community, and eventually leave. Therefore the issue of attracting potential members is crucial for a sustainable community of any kind. In order to do so, the community must have strong values and principles it is based upon. There is a wide variety of philosophies and schools of thought that deal with environmental issues. Various Western scholars developed environmental theories throughout the years to make proper reasoning for ecological values in an attempt to bind more like-minded people together and convince more of them to take part in the environmental movement. Two of these theories gained wide attention, and various social movements and eco-communities were established based on their morals.

2.2.2. Spiritualism embedded in environmentalism: Deep ecology and Social Ecology

In 1972, at the Third World Future Research Conference in Bucharest, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss delivered a lecture in which he first presented the idea of 'shallow ecology" and "deep ecology", which he later Published. This theory was later developed to be a worldwide eco-centric movement that laid the foundations for various environmental groups' manifestos and formed a debate about the role of humans in the world ecosystem. Deep ecology offers a broad, long-term and skeptical position towards environmental policies of any agency

and calls for a fundamental change in the treatment of nature by humans, as well as reconsiders the importance of human lives compared to other forms of life.

According to Næss, **shallow ecology** is an anthropocentric economic approach, in which the environment is valuable but only instrumentally and only when it benefits human beings. Humans do not appreciate nature for its contribution to the system as a whole but only as a commodity. In contrast, the appropriate way to treat nature is by practicing **deep ecology**, which poses an intrinsic value to the environment. Deep ecology approach has several tenants: (1) All living things have an intrinsic value which comes from the richness and diversity they provide to the system; (2) diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values; (3) human have no right to reduce this richness and diversity accept to satisfy vital human needs; (4) the flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population, and the flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease; (5) therefore, humans have an obligation to adopt policies that protect the vital needs of all living things while sacrificing non-vital needs (Clarke, 2010).

Deep ecology places heavy criticism over the technological optimism and scientific management of the ecological crisis and considering it as shallow ecology. It is also critical towards materialistic, consumer-oriented practices and limitless economic growth. One of the supporters of deep ecology, Alan Drengson, explains the fundamental differences between deep and shallow ecology this way: "Both historically and in the contemporary movement Næss saw two different forms of environmentalism, not necessarily incompatible with one another. One he called the *long-range deep ecology movement,* and the other is the *shallow ecology movement*. The word *deep,* in part, referred to the level of questioning of our purposes and values when arguing in environmental conflicts. The *deep* movement involves deep questioning, right down to fundamentals. The *shallow* stops before the ultimate level" (Drengson, 1995, p. 2). According to Drengston, deep refers to deep questioning related to the fundamental problems of the relationship between the human and non-human world.

Several attempts to answer some of these deep questions were made by philosophers and biologists who claimed that humans are only one part of a bigger system that they do not fully comprehend. At that time of awakening criticism over mass pollution and the deterioration of the environment, other events enhanced the impact of Deep Ecology, making it a school of thought rather than an esoteric opinion. These events include the publication of the book Silent Spring (1962) by Rachel Carson (although it was prior to the introduction of Deep Ecology, it was heavily influential), the establishment of Greenpeace in 1972, and the ideas of former astronaut Edgar Mitchell who advocated for a major shift in people

consciousness in order to overcome the ecological crisis. These ideas resonated with the principles on which Deep Ecology was based, and in turn, led to wider influences. These influences can be seen in books such as Animal Liberation (1975) by Peter Singer, and The Monkey Wrench Gang (1975) by Edward Abbey, and the radical environmental advocacy group Earth First! (1980). Yet although Deep Ecology was rather popular amongst some, it was heavily criticized by others who did not appreciate the criticism over humankind as a whole and suggested other frameworks to address ecological problems. One such critic is Murray Bookchin, an American political philosopher and educator who established a new school of thought as an answer to Deep Ecology's flaws.

Social Ecology, which was developed throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, understands all ecological problems as social problems. The main tenet of social ecology is to understand the relationship between nature and society. Social ecology believes that this relationship is a holistic unity manifested in diversity. It recommends humans use their gifts of sociability, communication, and intelligence to solve ecological problems instead of turning them into the very source and origin from which environmental devastation occurs. It also aims to reintegrate human social development with biological development and human communities with eco-communities. In order to achieve these goals, social ecology advocates the elimination of objective social causes like social hierarchy, capitalism, and nation-state and calls for a new observation of humans over society and nature (Light, 1998).

Social Ecology, at large, claims that all environmental problems stem from social problems and that the domination of nature by humans is rooted in the domination of humans by humans. Social Ecology examines environmental problems from an evolutionary point of view to realize how human intervention caused environmental problems. Bookchin claims that in order to prevent further environmental devastation, humans must create a rational ethical and Liberatore society with decentralized and democratic communities. He did not only call for the extermination of hierarchy, capitalism, racism, and sexism but also for the establishment of a society that is based upon libertarian municipalism and communalism. Bookchin suggested a framework that discusses mainly three aspects: human nature, domination, and hierarchy.

When discussing human nature, the claim is that stating that competition, systems of domination and hierarchy is a part of human nature gives the ultimate justification for capitalist societies to rise. However, from a dialectical perspective, this assumption is no longer valid. Dialectical naturalism seeks to examine how society was developed out of nature, the interaction between society and nature, and how both depend on one another. Furthermore, the development of systems of domination and hierarchy could also be better understood through

dialectical naturalism, which discussed three kinds of nature: first nature – the natural, biological and non-social world, second nature – the distinguished social world of humans, which is the society (institutionalized community, in Bookchin's definition), and free nature – nature rendered self-conscious in a rational and ecological society, or, second nature harmonizing with the first nature.

The third nature, which Bookchin advocated, calls humans to use their intelligence and technologic supremacy to develop and preserve the natural world. The problem, Bookchin claims, is not the practice but the values the society is operating according to, where competition, self-interest and eternal growth is placed above all else. If technology is utilized to benefit humans instead of rising above humans, people will have more time to develop their creative interests, spend time with their loved ones, and develop an interest in politics which determines most aspects of their lives. It is ultimately, according to Bookchin, the system of domination and hierarchy that is the cause for all social and ecological ills (Bookchin, 1993).

Both movements, Deep Ecology and Social Ecology, have many similarities between them, and some even integrated between them (see Wirth's Deep Social Ecology, 2021), they did not seem to have a recorded direct effect in Japan. However, various Western schools of thought, as well as the environmental movement, did influence Japanese thinking, and with the development of trade in ideas and scholarship between Japan and the west since the post-war era, it is expected that such ecological ideas would influence Japanese environmentalists, environmental groups and movements. To understand not only the foreign influences over the Japanese environmental movement, but also the nature of such groups, a review of the scholarly work regarding them will follow.

2.2.3. The environmental movement in Japan

The accelerated growth in postwar Japan can be directly linked to the rising number of environmental problems, particularly since the 1960s. However, it was only in the late 1970s that the research of these problems' social influences was developed. The first scholar who discussed the relationship between environmental problems and Japanese society was Japanese sociologist Iijima Nabuko. Her major work of chronology of environmental problems throughout Japanese history (Iijima, 1977; Iijima, 1979), along with her work on pollution victims (Iijima, 1984) were the first to acknowledge such relationships. Another prominent scholar in the social aspects of environmental issues in Japan is Hasegawa Kōichi, who established the sub-discipline of environmental sociology in Japan. His work spans from the 1980's anti-nuclear movement (Hasegawa, 1995; Hasegawa, 1996), high-speed traffic victims'

movement (mainly opposing the shinkansen) (Hasegawa, 2007), and the civil society reaction to Fukushima nuclear accident (Hasegawa, 2014). Both Iijima and Hasegawa helped shaping the clear research objectives of environmental sociology in Japan and determine what its subjects are: (1) environmental problems, (2) the relationship between environment and society, and (3) the environmental view and concerns of the people (Hasegawa 1996b: 135).

Iijima developed a framework to look into postwar environmental movements and categorized them in four movement types: (1) anti-pollution victims' movements, (2) anti-development movements, (3) pollution-export protest movements, and (4) environmental protection and environment creation movements (Iijima, 1995, chapter 5), yet some of the movements can be categorized under more than one type (see table 2). While the first three types called mainly for a change in policy, acknowledgment from polluting offenders, compensations to victims, and acted to *end* or *stop* harmful polluting practices, the fourth differ by calling for a positive (*doing*, *acting*) initiations to promote preservation and encourage initiations designed to support environmental prosperity. These movements focused not only on the human aspect of pollution but also on the negative effects of the wider sense of the environment, including wildlife, human society, and highlighted the economic disadvantage of environmental devastation as it will only benefit a small elite but will be hazardous for the majority of the people. For that reason, 1980's environmental protection movements developed ideologies that would change society (ibid).

During the 1990's, environmental awareness continued to increase in Japan, and the number of pollution disturbance cases grew from 63,000 in 1980 to nearly 80,000 in 1992 (Environmental Agency, 1995). Yet many of the grass-roots environmental movements were based on the importance of the concept of "quality of life", that is, to improve the participants' personal life, and done so by promoting nature conservation, environmental education, and recycling. Their focus was more towards creating an environment for leisure and relaxation, without discussing its intrinsic value as a core value for their activities (Watanuki, 1984). However, while there were no prominent protests and large-scale activities of environmental movements in Japan, the fact that many Japanese NGOs participated in the UNCED in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, raised awareness of global environmental concerns in younger Japanese (Schreurs, 2002). However, this time, the concern was not focused only on local environmental problems, but on global ones, such as climate change, global environmental pollution, and sustainable development (Iijima, 1995). These broader concerns, which involves many actors, and in this sense are also harder to solve, attracted attention not only from the public, NGOs, participants in environmental movements, and governments, but also from other groups which

Table 2: Environmental movements types Interviewees (Iijima, 1995)

Movement type	First emerged	Issues	Characteristics
Pollution victims	1950s	Compensation for health damage, pollution prevention measures, protection of future generations (Big Four Pollution Cases[4])	Successful in promoting the government to enact a number of pollution prevention laws, pollution health damage law in the end 1960s early 1970s.
Anti- development	1970s	Opposition to public and industrial development projects, which endanger or destroy the local natural and living environment.	Hazards the movement stood against are: noise pollution, water- and air-quality deterioration. Movements: right of sunshine movement, anti-Shinkansen movement, anti- airport movements and more.
Pollution export protest	1970s	Pollution and the obstruction of economical and human resources in foreign countries through pollution d generated by Japan.	The pollution was caused mainly by corporations wished to evade the strong environmental standards in Japan and preferred to destroy the environment in foreign countries.
Environmental protection/ natural environment creation	1970s/1980s	Aimed to protect and preserve the natural environment, satoyama landscape, and cultural treasures. Historical origins are said to be National Trust Movement in the UK.	These movements include recycling movement, environmental creation, town planning, and more.

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[4] The Big Four pollution cases refer to the disease cases developed as a consequence of pollution in Minamata, Yokkaichi, Toyama, and Niigata (George 1996).

found correlation between environmental values to spiritual values, and connected their practices with a philosophy that combine spiritual improvement and environmental prosperity.

2.2.4. Environmentalism as a spiritual movement in Japan

Environmental concerns are often manifested in Japanese religious groups too. The discourse of contradiction between religion and environmentalism (see Harper, 2008) is somewhat different in Japan. The Japanese Shinto is a pantheistic "nature religion"; hence divinity is embedded in the natural world, and therefore, ideological clashes between environmentalism and religious thinking are not recorded as they do with Christianity in the west, where religion was first criticized by science and later by environmentalists from some scientific doctrines. It is not rare to encounter NRM, NNR, and other spiritual groups' ideologies that declare that one of their main objectives is to preserve nature and live based on organic agriculture. In fact, some of the biggest religious groups support such practices. Some examples for the connectivity between spirituality and environmentalism in Japanese spiritual groups are: Shinji Shūmeikai, a NNR based in Shiga prefecture that claims that physical purification is based on organic agriculture, Sekai Kyusei and Mahikari which were both also devoted to organic agriculture as a mean to transform the world into a utopian one. Yet, the most prominent example of the usage of environmentalism to attract new followers is seen in the Yamagishi movement, which attracted its first followers through agricultural workshops that the founder was holding. When participants came to the workshop on chicken raising methods, the leader, Yamagishi, used to share his philosophical ideas and try to recruit them into his group.

It is suggested that the environmental movement is driven first by ethical concerns, whether it is for nature, including the plants and animals living there, or for human health and future generations who will need to live in a world with a deteriorated environment because of damages currently being done. Therefore, it is suggested that individuals who are engaged in the environmental movement or similar activities will also show interest in other activities which are considered as ethical concerns such as human rights and equality (like feminism and multiculturalism, see Sterba, 2000), animal rights (Hadley, 2017), and similar topics such as health safety, and data management. Some also suggested that environmentalism is a form of spirituality in its belief (Baker & Morrison, 2008; Taylor, 2001; Sponsel, 2019) because of its nature of interconnectedness, and even received the name eco-spirituality (Shenoy, 2016). Then, with the increasing concern for the local and global environment's condition, and the

criticism pointed at the current society and the way it operates, it is clear why individuals with such concerns will seek for a new way of living, or a community to live in which the solution to the environmental problems is one of its objectives. Then, raising these interests in a given community by suggesting environmental solutions and practices, which are embedded in the way the community operates, can be successful in attracting new visitors who strive for a fundamental change in the society and are open to hearing new solutions and worldviews.

Yet, those who are reluctant from religions may resist visiting a religious group that offers environmental solutions merely because of its definition or since they are suspicious towards the given religion's intentions. This can explain the massive growth of the Yamagishi movement presented earlier, which did not offer religious doctrines, but spiritual and more philosophical ones unrelated to high divinities. With no religious intentions to raise antagonism, visitors could listen, open-minded, to the leader's philosophy, which made them more likely to follow him, compared to those who would suspect the intentions are religious, and even more than those who would not even come out of hesitation to visit a religion, no matter what environmental practices they offer are. This underlines the importance of the group's reputation and its believed religious-objectiveness in the eyes of those who choose to (or choose not) to have any relations with it.

Although Japan is often described as a 'homogenous' society, the variety of spiritual groups and religions is wide. While many of these groups are claiming not to be a religion, it is hard not to wonder whether they intend to draw new members by using an environmental definition when their operation is identical to that of a religion, or whether they deny religious definitions for other reasons. Although Religious groups in Japan may seem like a marginal phenomenon, in fact, around ten per cent of Japanese society take part in their activities in one way or another (Inoue, 2009, 18). Thus, understanding the mechanism by which individuals are drawn to NNR is important and can clarify the psychological factors that ten per cent of the Japanese population are influenced by. The will to be a part of a group that is said to live by certain values that seem utopian, and that call for a change to current society is undoubtedly present in the Japanese population. However, many variables will affect the individual in their decision to join the group they have encountered.

Attracting the attention of individuals seeking for a change in their lives can be a first step of the NNR to offer more practices and beliefs. Then, they might have more opportunities to persuade the given individual to participate in more of their activities, read their materials, and adopt certain practices to their lives. However, the essential mental, physical and social

conditions of the potential member are the key to their decision to make a fundamental change in their lives and join a new religion (Ullman, 1982). Therefore, the group which the individual chooses to join could potentially be any group which provides an answer to their problems, difficulties, or unease they experience in their lives. This research attempts to portray the recruiting mechanism of a religious group that offers solutions to the environmental concerns of its members, and then persuades them to alter their values, lifestyle, and dedicate themselves to the group. This case study of KH tries to investigate the role of spiritual communities' definition in attracting new members. This research's main goal is to draw an accurate picture of how KH's their mechanism and the methods by which it operates.

3. Methodology

The data analyzed in this thesis was collected during fieldwork conducted from the 20th of October 2017 to 24th of February 2018, with a one month break during December 2017. During that period, I stayed in the KH community in Fujinomiya, Shizuoka prefecture, lived in their property, ate all my meals with the community, participated in the community meetings (which were not privately held), and had countless informal conversations with all the community's members and affiliates, such as long-term guests, care-guests, international and domestic visitors, parents of members who came for a visit, parents of care-guests etc.). In the first month of my stay, my status in the community was that of a volunteer: I was staying in the community free of charge, was given a room to sleep in and was provided with three meals a day in exchange for working in agriculture, the community kitchen, cleaning, helping the community at food stands they ran at local events, packing products, preparing lunch boxes for sale, and the like. In this time, I got to know the community, its properties all around Fujinomiya, the community's houses and warehouses, the fields they borrow from the locals, the greenhouses, and all other agricultural possessions. In the second period of my stay, from the 4th of January until February 25th, 2018, I was a paying guest and focused on learning about community members, their beliefs and practices. I interviewed community members, read all the community materials I could get hold of in English and in Japanese, and participated in the community's annual event – the Fuji Sengen Matsuri – a Shinto ritual they hold once a year. During the first period, I stayed in the community's main house, Hontaku, where the adults from the kitchen team, fields team, rice paddy team, and harvest team live together with the older children. In the second period, I stayed in Konohana Ann, next to Himawari house, where members of the central team, child-raising team, the younger children, and some other members of the kitchen team live. As the main dining hall was under renovation, lunch and dinner were served separately for most of my stay, and Hontaku and Himawari residents dined separately. As mealtimes are a time of informal conversations and interactions between members, I had the chance to get to know members from both houses. It is, however, important to mention that Jiiji, the community's leader, dines separately with a few members of the community in the property he lives in, Yūsenkaku, where I was never invited to dine. In both periods, I held regular meetings with Jiiji and participated in all of the community's meetings and lectures.

3.1. Semi-structured interviews and weekly meetings

During my second period of stay in KH I held 19 interviews with KH members (17 with adult members and 2 with young members aged 13 and 18, see table 3). The questions were mainly regarding four topics: demographic, life-phase until joining KH, living in KH, the future of KH. Some of the members were very open and willing to tell their stories while others gave short answers as if they were trying to be on the "safe side" (my impression) and to not expose too much information. The interview time varied greatly from member to member, as some interviews lasted 45 minutes and others more than three hours. All the interviews were tape-recorded, and transcribed. Although the presence of a tape-recorder could have influenced the answers of my interviewees, the decision to use it was based on the importance of making eye-contact during the interview and attempting to put the words into context of the non-verbal communication. The interviews were held mostly in the tatami room which served as my room during my stay, located in KH guests facilities, Konohana Ann.

18 of the interviewees were personally chosen by me based on my preliminary acquaintance with them. My goal was to interview members from both genders, different period of membership in the community, founding members, new members, various team members (office team, rice paddy team etc. along with members with unique roles in the community as Jiiji's secretary, and educational programs' assistance), different marital status, and different parentage status. One of the interviewees I chose (the 19th) was replaced by Jiiji as he noted that she was a founding member and I have already interviewed a founding member before. He asked to replace this ,e,ber with a woman in her late 40's who suffered from severe cancer and now is healed. Jiiji suggested that she healed thanks to improving her spirituality and therefore her life- story conveys KH's importance better. Although I did not think interviewing her was necessary as I already knew her story from her, from other members, from reading her blog, and from a master thesis I read about the community, I accepted Jiiji's request to not raise antagonism.

Besides the interviews, I was suggested by Yumi, Jiiji's secretary, to hold weekly meetings with him. First, I was hoping to hold a semi-structured interview with him, but was proven otherwise quite fast: his answers tend to be long, and combined mostly spiritual themes and would not answer directly to what I was asking. For instance, in all the interviews I was asking members about their childhood, but with Jiiji, asking him about his childhood made a whole meeting. For that reason I could not call the meetings with him "interviews". Although very different from other members, these meetings had a high contribution to my research, since it helped me understand the community, the context of its foundation, the community's

intentional design, the founding members and other members (who Jiiji spoke about often) better. In some of the meetings, I was also told about one of the members' life-story after or before I interviewed them, giving me a different perspective of their narratives.

Table 3: Interviewees (all names are pseudonyms)

	Name	Age	Gender	Years in KH
1	Chiyo	52	f	11
2	Kenji	31	m	7
3	Akiko	64	f	24
4	Emi	50	f	20
5	Dada-chan	79	f	24
6	Yūki	38	m	7
7	Pon-man	64	m	24
8	Nana	46	f	24
9	Ayumi	48	f	19
10	Mariko	54	f	13
11	Sumi	13	f	13
12	Misaki	40	f	6
13	Mai	39	f	6
14	Koe	19	f	19
15	Honda	32	m	1
16	Ojiya	47	m	4
17	Shin-chan	33	f	Less than 1
18	Yumi	40	f	10
19	Sano	36	m	6

In this thesis I will analyze the narratives of the community members. The stories people tell help them to reach out to others, memorize their past and give significance to their lives. The stories told by subjects imply their intentions through the story's structure, when to start, when to end, what to include in it and what to omit (Miyahara, 2010; Martinez-Roldan, 2003). The story is said to be a form of knowledge that grasps the nuances of human life events (Carter, 1993). The hidden meanings, that the narrator might not be aware of, can provide a comprehensive view over the narrator's world view and understanding. Young (1987) claimed that the difference between any text and a narrative is the consequential continuity that exists in the story: one event causes the next to occur when there is a chronological link. Scholes (1980) claimed that a story should consist of a conflict situation or a problem, a main role handling this situation, and a sequence causality that would ultimately lead to the solution. The stories analyzed in this thesis belong to Langellier's "personal narratives" category (1989).

Gergen & Gergen (1984) defined personal narratives by the narrator's satisfaction level from his condition at the end of the narrative compared to the beginning of the narrative. They pointed out three different personal narrative types; regressive narrative – indicating that the satisfaction level decreased from the beginning of the narrative, Static narrative – indicating the satisfaction level remained the same, and progressive narrative – indicating the satisfaction level increased. In KH most of the narratives can be identified with the second and the last types.

3.2. Written materials analysis

Despite the fact that most of the data in this thesis is based on interviews I held with current community members and materials members provided me with, some of the information I will present is based on articles, websites, and other scholarly works I found on the internet, in academic journals and other database systems. Written materials by the community provided me with comprehensive information about their beliefs, worldview, the community's history as it is told by them, core principles, and data about their work and production. Materials written about the community were used to examine how the community is observed from an external point of view, what kind of information was gathered about the community, and how they operated in the past. It was essential for cross-referencing information provided by the community and to examine multiple facets of various aspects of the community's recruiting system, and the community in general.

I regularly asked the community about information written about them, even when it meant facing them with criticism of KH or articles and opinions tarnishing the community. Their explanations for some of the criticism, and sometimes somewhat problematic and illegal practices, published about them are crucial for understanding their justifications, or denials, of certain events or facts about the community. Furthermore, on some occasions, the negative reputation of the community was mentioned by the community members themselves or was openly shared in community meetings which I attended, such as a community meeting whose topic was the lawsuit against KH by a former member. The members always portrayed themselves as open and willing to share anything, and constantly claimed they had nothing to hide.

3.3. Research transparency and methodological limitations

To maintain research integrity, all community members knew I was there to conduct academic research and was about to publish my work about KH. On some occasions, they even

took pride in having a Kyoto University student come to conduct research about them and presented me to guests as *the Kyoto University students who came to write about KH*. During the interviews, I always mentioned that I will use the information in my research and will not disclose anyone's name (aside from Jiiji, all of the names used in this thesis are pseudonyms). In most of the interviews, they immediately responded that I was free to write their real names and that I could do with the information whatever I wished to do. This could, however, be a limitation of my data collection, as members could have presented me with inaccurate or even false information, as they knew it would be published. In order to overcome such limitations, I have tried to verify versions of the same stories with a few members and sometimes even with non-members who were involved in the community. I did find numerous discrepancies in some of the members' stories or narratives, which I shall present in this thesis.

The narratives, operating methods and life stories presented in this work are, indeed, not a "sterile" laboratory observation, but stories told by people, whose memories can mislead them and who can interpret situations in various ways (Appel & Richter, 2007). The process of creating a narrative may produce a version different from the truth in some cases, and hence it is important to treat all information presented by the members with caution. Yet, the only way to gain knowledge of the recruiting methods used by KH is to gather it mainly by asking current members about their experience of joining the community, observing the community as an outsider, and diligently asking those who are involved with KH to provide their viewpoint on this process.

Although a major attempt was executed to conduct this research in the most objective, scientific approach, there are still some areas where weaknesses are present:

3.3.1. Research question was extracted post field work

Despite the fact that during the three months of my field work in KH, I was able to collect a large amount of data in various different forms, the research question of this thesis took shape only after I was back at my laboratory desk. The questions I asked during interviews, daily conversations, and meetings were not designed to investigate whether or not the environmental aspect was drawing new members to the community, nor how institutionalized this method was. I was not searching for data specific to this domain, and the analyzed materials of this thesis were chosen following a careful examination after my departure from KH. However, I believe that the high number of quality materials, such as interviews, meetings, daily conversations with members and guests, community presentations, blog posts, academic works, mass media articles, and movies about the community are sufficient to draw a reliable

picture of the community's recruitment system and use it as a frame by which to analyze other communities' recruitment systems.

3.3.2. Kyoto University Researcher

In Japan, Kyoto University is known as the second-best university in the country. It is hard to get accepted, and only a small percentage of those who take the entrance examination for a bachelor's degree get in. Some do not even bother to try as they know their chances of passing these exams are extremely low. Hence, many Japanese perceive Kyoto University students as educated and more intelligent than the average person. A common reaction when telling a Japanese person that I study at Kyoto University is: "you must be very smart". Kyoto University leaves a great impression, which in this case might have changed the perception of me in KH. As I was not a regular guest, but a declared researcher, who came in order to publish research about the community, I believe this had an effect on the information I was exposed to. It might be that members would have spoken with me more openly if I had only come to KH as a volunteer. Furthermore, in some cases, I was introduced to new Japanese guests as a researcher from Kyoto University, even when I was absent: when introducing the community, they mentioned that there was also a Kyoto University researcher who had come to publish a paper about the community. In a way, it seemed like they took pride in having a researcher from the second-best university in Japan there to get to know the community better, as it implied that the community was important enough to gain interest from respected establishments.

Another way my title might have influenced the research is through members looking at me as a scholar. In particular, Yumi, Jiiji's secretary (whom I will introduce later), was always eager to share with me her own written material about spiritual improvement, presentations to community members or visitors, blog posts that members had written, and materials transcribed from Jiiji's talks, hoping I would analyze them and include them in my paper. Once, she even invited me to sit and talk with her in Lotus Land and would not let me pay for my drink or dessert. In that sense, I was different from other guests, and there is a high degree of certainty that the treatment I received and the information I was provided with was influenced by the institution I was affiliated with, or at least, my work as a researcher.

3.3.3. An Israeli among Japanese

In my view, this is the most prominent limitation of this research. Although I have a bachelor's degree in Japanese Studies and experience of living in Japan for more than five years, there are always hidden mores that cannot be understood by a non-Japanese person. The most basic manners of human communication might be perceived differently from a Japanese and an Israeli point of view, and when it comes to the margins of Japanese society, the cultural gap can have an even greater influence on the researcher's perception of what is common and what is not. For instance, the fact that I was younger than all the adult members in the community might not have had any influence if it had been in Israel, but it has a great effect in Japanese society. Eye-to-eye contact, body language – it might all have affected the research in ways that I do not even comprehend. One more example I clearly remember is the attitude towards children. In Israel, it is illegal to hit a child, yet in KH, I was exposed to adults hitting children in the head and on other parts of the body if they were doing something wrong. I had to ask a Japanese mother whom I knew from university for an explanation, asking her whether it is commonly accepted in Japan to hit a child in the head. Her answer was: "It is ok, but you wouldn't expect someone else to hit your child". In this case, it clarified to me that KH was not violent in comparison to Japanese society in general, but also that the KH worldview sees all the adults in the community as the parents of all children.

Another inevitable aspect of not being Japanese is the limitation of my language skills. I did know enough Japanese to understand work instructions and life stories to a certain degree, but I could not conduct the interviews and understand the meetings by myself. I enjoyed the great help of KH interpreters who were always there in every interview and meeting and in all of the child and adult meetings in Himawari (during the second period of my stay). In the first period of my stay, I listened to the children's meetings in Hontaku and had a limited understanding of their reports. However, the fact that my interpreters for the research were KH members forms a limitation: it was not a neutral atmosphere for the interviewees to talk, and occasionally the interpreter would add some of her interpretation or opinion to the interview.

3.3.4. A Much-Studied Community

By the time of my arrival at KH, it had already been researched by other anthropologists, students and journalists, and there were even movie producers and directors coming to the community. Three master's theses had already been written about KH, and it had been featured in newspapers, magazines, and other media channels. Therefore, it can be

assumed that the members were well-prepared for being watched and interviewed, and their past experience may have affected their natural reactions. For instance, when interviewing the founding members, I found that they provided the same examples of events that had happened at the beginning of the community. I could not help but wonder if those events had become embedded in their consciousness as "the narrative of the beginning of the community" while being asked the same questions over and over again and hearing each other's answers. The fact that the members were also interviewed multiple times must have also prepared them for interview settings, giving them learning opportunities for subsequent interviews, helping them prepare answers to repeated questions, and deciding what they would like to expose and what they would not like to share based on past experience. Also, the presence of the tape-recorder is a crucial matter in the community: although it was not a discouraging element in the interviews, it might also be suggested that since the members are used to its presence, they are used to being careful as they are always being recorded. This might have both a negative and a positive effect on the reliability of the research.

I did find holes in the narratives of some members when reading previous materials written about the community. For example, one of the members (whose role cannot be mistaken) had presented her early days in the community as challenging because other members had not accepted her, while in the interview I held with her, she presented her early days as blissful and enlightening. While engaging with members who were well-prepared to answer my questions with pre-constructed narratives that sometimes distorted the facts about their own lives and the community, I was constantly reminded that as a researcher, I should always be cautious when told about past events which I was not there to witness first hand.

Unfortunately, these limitations were unavoidable in this setting and environment, though every possible step to mitigate these disadvantages has been taken. I believe that along with the negative effects, there were also advantages: since the KH interpreters knew I was researching the community, they would occasionally voluntarily translate materials that KH members had written for me, which they thought might benefit my research. They also provided me with a lot of written information that made a great contribution to my understanding of KH beliefs, values, and practices. Furthermore, the fact that I am not Japanese could be viewed in a different light; perhaps, in the eyes of some KH members, they would not have to face the criticism they usually faced from external Japanese society when telling me their stories, thoughts and ideas. In the case of the interpreters, it was, in fact, very helpful at some interviews to have a KH member who understood the context of the things being said and added useful information for a better understanding of the interviewee's answers. The

interpreters did not only translate but sometimes explained basic elements of Japanese life and community life.

3.4. Chapter outline

This thesis will discuss KH and their operation, beliefs and practices, in particular the social and environmental aspects. First, in chapter (4) Organic agriculture-based economy, a review of the community's work, economic system and environmental features will proceed. Then, chapter (5) Nature as a model for society, will present the model on which KH is said to be based, the structure of the community and its artistic aspects. In chapter (6) Divinity oriented environmentalism, the leadership of the community, together with its justification and significance, will be discussed. The following chapter, (7) Appreciation of wild education, will elaborate on how the community conveys knowledge to its members and guests. Finally, chapter (8) Bounded scenery, will discuss the separations embedded in the community in different ways. This thesis will end with chapters (9) Discussion and Conclusion to summarize the work.

4. Organic agriculture-based economy

There is no doubt that the basic physical needs of every society are food and shelter. It is even more significant when a certain group wishes to be independent and not rely on external supply, knowledge, or workforce. However, while in modern society only a very small percentage of people (if any) hold the knowledge and work experience through which self-sufficiency can be attained, most of us still rely on others to build our houses and grow our food. Yet when we discuss a group of people trying to gain independence from external actors, knowledge and the working force can be distributed between the members and create a collaboration that will make the group self-sustained. KH is attempting to do exactly that: create self-sufficiency by using the specialty and expertise of each member and form a community that does not rely on external supply.

However, as KH is still operating in the modern world and enjoys the benefits of modern machinery, infrastructures, production, and services such as the medical system, governmental support, and other services, they are still players in the social and financial systems and therefore involved with official institutions and the external Japanese society. Their self-sufficiency is only in terms of food and infrastructure, while they make a living when selling their products and services. With the money, they can operate in society and enjoy its economic system and benefits.

4.1. A self-sustained community

KH has impressive scales of organic products they grow for sale and for self-consumption (see table 4), by which they were able to achieve self-sufficiency. Their self-sufficiency dates back to the fourth year of the community (according to some members), and they claim they only buy salt, spices, oil, and vinegar. Besides the fields they are cultivating, KH also produces its own Miso, soy sauce and Omiki in the traditional way for self-consumption and produces organic honey both for their own use and for sale. They also produce their own fertilizer by combining neem, zeolite and calcium, and their own compost made from dry leaves and chicken manure. The community is very proud of its production and brand their products and café as "organic", so it will be highly evaluated, as one of the members explained to me. Overall, 90 per cent of the community's production is out for sale, and the rest 10 percent of the production is what the community needs to feed the members and the guests.

Table 4: KH Production Details (according to KH data)

Kind	Items	Kinds	Classification	Field size(m^2)
root vegetables	18	74	vegetables	29875
Cabbage / Lettuce	5	40		
leafs	29	36		
herb	1	13		
wild vegetables	1	6		
vegetables	22	57		
aloe	1	2		
beans	9	15	beans & millet	62178
millet	6	8		
tea	1	2	tea & fruits	3163
fruits	24	44		
mushrooms	1	2	mushrooms	300
rice	4	9	rice	73381
makomo	1	1		
green manure	1	4	-	-
Total	**124**	**313**	-	**168897**

The work in the community is organized by teams; every team has permanent members, and one of them is the team's leader. The team's leader organizes the work, decides which team member does, and is in charge of jobs given to volunteers and guests. However, while working with the teams, it did not seem that any member was superior or inferior to the other, nor any member seemed to organize the work: making the schedule, planning, and working seemed to be decided after the team meetings when everyone was talking and deciding together.

The members are usually bound to their teams by their physical abilities and proficiencies. For example, one of the members, Ojiya, who joined the community six years ago, used to be a chef prior to his membership; hence he joined the kitchen staff. Even when problems occur, the members cannot change their teams for personal reasons and preferences. For example, in one of the meetings, Naka-chan, a 39-year-old female member, was telling the community that she does not like to be in the harvest team. She was asked by another member, Emi, after consulting with her, to write down what it is that she does not like about the harvest team and then shared it with everyone at the community meeting. She was saying:

I don't like the harvest team for a few reasons. I wrote it down: we start to work early and finish late, everyone is always only making excuses, Misaki and Mai are fighting all the time […]. But eventually, I understood that I am the one who makes these problems. I am responsible for all of it.

October 24th, 2017

After she finished saying why she does not like to be in the harvest team, Emi commented that it requires a spiritual solution. She said that if Naka-chan wants to change how she feels about the harvest team, she has to change herself. Everyone agreed with Emi, including Naka-chan. Changing the team was not even brought up as an option.

The teams are roughly divided into four categories (my categorization, see table 5). The categories are based on the work volume and the periods in which the work is done. The first category is the team the members first identify themselves with. Hence it is called *primary*. Most of the teams are agricultural or agriculture-related. Therefore, when new members encounter the community and meet KH members, one can easily mistake and think that agriculture is the most important aspect of the community. The second category is the *seasonal teams*. Members take part in these teams in addition to the teams they are participating in the *primary* category. The third category is *smaller* teams, as the work volume of these teams is much smaller, and the fourth category is *temporary* teams, which were established to achieve a temporary mission. An example for the fourth team is the "goheimochi team", which was established in order to improve the community's goheimochi recipe. This is the main distribution of the work in the community.

In the first years of the community, it obtained most of its income from selling organic agriculture. Yet today, the community gains its income also from workshops they hold, an annual seminar called "The Truth School" (which will be discussed in chapter 6), lectures, a café they own which is called Lotus Land, and the café's shop in which they sell products the manufacture but also products of other manufacturers, a healing salon called Tanpopo, monthly events, and occasional food stalls.

Table 5: KH Teams

Name of Category	The Teams in this Category	Periods of Work
Primary	Kitchen team, Lotus Land team, office team, child-raising team, central team, rice-paddy team, harvest team, seedling team, fields team, and construction team	All year long
Seasonal	Bee-keeping team. Konohana matsuri (festival) team. Nagano team.	From spring to autumn. November to February. March to December.
Smaller	*A-UN* Soba-restaurant team. Tampopo (healing salon) team. KH band. Design team. Chicken raising team. KH theater team. Sells promotion team.	Once a month. All year long. All year long. Whenever a design is needed. All year long. Once a year (not necessarily). Whenever is needed.
Temporary	KH festival Gold-Demon-mask design team. Goheimochi team.[5]	Changes depending on the necessity.

4.2. Shared economic system

The system through which all income is generated is operated by one of the community members, called Yukio. I was informed that in the past, the community had all of its money in a jar, and whenever a member needed to use it, they would take the money and return a receipt to the jar. Once in a while, one of the members would count the receipts for taxation. Yet, when the community had a tax investigation, tax officials announced to them that they could no longer operate in this way and that it was illegal. From this time on, the community started operating differently: the income of the community is divided into separate bank accounts, which every member has under their names, and then this money is used for whatever purposes the community needs. Yukio has all the official seals of all the members, and he is the only one

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[5] These were the temporary teams in the period I visited KH.

who is handling the money in the community. His job is as the account manager of the community. One of the members told me that she believes none of the members knows what is the amount of money in their bank account, nor what transactions were executed, but only Yukio does. Members usually do not use money in their daily lives, as they are provided with all their basic needs, and in fact, most of them do not carry a wallet except in special circumstances. It is said that each member receives around 20,000 JPY each month, transferred to their bank account, but no member whom I spoke with ever checked whether it is true or not.

The equation of working hours or productivity equals money does not exist in KH. Members work every day not for material gain but for spiritual profit as they believe that by improving their work, they can improve their spirituality. This idea makes working hours, a numerical parameter, translate to a more abstract profit that all community members are working hard to achieve. This is their goal when waking up early to work in the fields, kitchen, office, infrastructure, or any other work they do.

Still, it is not only by work that community members improve their spirituality but also by proving, to themselves and to other members, that they have no attachments whatsoever. Members are encouraged to speak their minds and confess about everything they go through, including their thoughts and feelings, in the community meetings, team meetings, and on their meetings with Jiiji. They claim that this releases them from attachments to their own thoughts and ideas, as one of the main principles of the community emphasizes: no attachments. This is another example of the "share everything with everyone" principle, along with sharing any physical things such as belongings, property, and money. One of the sentences community members are repeating is: *"I have nothing which is mine, but my underwear and my toothbrush"*. It is important to note, however, that members do have their own belongings: they write their names on their clothes, towels, shoes, bottles, and they do have belongings they brought with them when joining the community. In these cases, they treat these belongings as theirs. One example of that was when I asked if the community had a bicycle I could borrow so I could easily go from one property to another without being dependent on anyone to drive me. The answer I received was, *"Hiroko has a bicycle. We should ask her if we can use them"*. However, other than that, it does seem like the community is sharing all physical belongings.

The reason for sharing their thoughts with everyone is not only to prove they have no mental attachments but also to allow other community members to help them improve their spirituality. The first step is to release the attachment to their thoughts or feelings, and the second would be allowing others to comment and give them feedback. Then, the manifestation

of such spiritual improvement should be seen through the members' work and attitude in the community.

4.3. Nature as a reflection of the mentality

Although there are no numerical ways to measure the improvement in the spirituality of any member, there are ways to see progress. The quality and quantity of the members' work is a way to evaluate their spirituality. Founding members claim that it has always been that way and that the member who introduced this measuring system is Jiiji. Here is one of the stories one founding member told in the interview:

> *In the beginning, I worked with Jiiji in the vegetable fields, and while working in the fields, for example, we drew the line that we should plant according to. If I plant deviating from the line we had drawn, he would say that my spirit is deviant, and I should straighten it. […] In the beginning, I made our chicks die a lot. If I could not really observe chickens well or if I am not feeling completely one with them, then I would be in a not-stable condition. That's why Jiiji really scolded me.*

<div align="right">

February 19th, 2018

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In another interview, one of the elderly members, who is also a founding member, told the same story:

> *At that time [when founding the community], Jiiji was in charge of the field. When we would cultivate the field, we had to make the field very nice. If we planted something, it had to be straight. If it deviated even just a little bit, Jiiji would say 'your mind deviates'. That's why Kan chan had a lot of discipline. Rather than being hard, that was just being conscious about what we were doing. But that's why it was really… if Jiiji had treated the current members like that, people would probably leave, but at that time, Jiiji also didn't know how to treat us, and also we didn't know how to do it, so it was a very hard time. That's why those founding members are very determined to go through this kind of situation. This was really the foundation of Konohana family.*

<div align="right">

February 20th, 2018

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Yumi, Jiiji's secretary, can also evaluate the members' spiritual level. When asked how she evaluates, she answered:

> *[…] for their spiritual level, we can sense it. That's why Jiiji says he always gives marks to the members because he can sense […] with intuition. With vibrancy. He can sense, I can sense, maybe you can sense that too. 'That person is this level or that level' - we can tell. I can*

sense from their atmosphere, vibrancy and from their words and actions. And the consistency between their words and actions. We can sense it.

February 12th, 2018

Although all members are evaluated by their work, as the community is agriculturally based, the manifestation of the community's spirituality in the crops and production is largely discussed. In a way, all work, whether it is in the office, infrastructure, or finance, is done in order to maintain the high quality of the production. Some members were accused of making the fields grow less than they were expected to or making some crops ill because of the low spirituality that they transcended to the crops, and therefore, making the whole community suffer because of their low spirituality. However, the belief that spirituality affects nature is not only discussed in a negative manner but also in a neutral way too. The attitude and characteristics of the members are said to be manifested in nature in some ways, as one of the members from the rice-field team told me:

> *As for the rice fields, we begin in May. There are five men, five of us taking care of the rice fields. Each of us is in charge of a certain rice paddy, and we make sure the water is flowing in. We go to the rice paddy three times a day to check: morning, noon and evening. We start from May until September, so for four months, we go there every day, every day. Then, after these four months, the five men's individuality and characteristics can be clearly seen in the rice paddy.*

February 10th, 2018

This form of evaluation of members is one of the ways to increase the quality and the quantity of their work, but also as reasoning as to why they did not do well on their work or why mistakes happen. When a member (and sometimes a guest) is doing something wrong, it is always connected to having a bad or low spirituality. This equation works both ways: Improving one's work means they will necessarily increase their spirituality, and increasing the spiritual level will necessarily manifest in better work. If no improvement in the work is evident, it means that there was no spiritual improvement. Despite the fact that there are various spiritual levels for the members, KH as a community is proud of their high number of organic products, which are often said to be delicious, and indicates that when examining the community as a whole, their spiritual level is high.

4.4. Summary

KH is a success story of an agriculture-based community that achieved self-sufficiency. Indeed, most of the work surrounds the organic agriculture products the community produces, and therefore an external observer might get the wrong impression that the core of the community is agricultural. One needs to take a closer look to see that these works are done out of aspiration for spiritual purposes in the hope for individual spiritual development. When nature is nothing but a manifestation of the members' spirituality, they believe that they need to work harder and better to achieve the spirituality rank they aspire to, and only then the state of the environment will improve. With this logic, the community members believe that the environmental condition is secondary to their spirituality since spirituality is what causes everything to change for better or for worse.

KH believes that releasing all attachments and sharing everything with other community members is the ultimate way to get over the ego and gain a higher spiritual level. Therefore, members are encouraged to share all of their belongings, money and assets with the community. As this is a great relief for those who previously had economic difficulties or concerns, it is also limiting the members when considering leaving the community or wish to do something without receiving the community's approval. Also, sharing materialistic objects and money paves the path to the expectation from members to share more intimate thoughts and feelings.

As members are expected to share all of their thoughts and feelings with other community members, it indeed provides the answer to various psychological and social needs but also exposes the members' weaknesses to those who may not necessarily help and might even worsen the situation. The weaknesses are what some members of the community will refer to as "lower spirituality" and then will attempt to make the given community member who claims to have these weaknesses change in accordance with KH worldview. The justification of the community for doing so is that only in KH the given member can openly talk about his or her weaknesses without being judged, and only in KH there are people who can help this member. The answer to all weaknesses is to improve the spirituality, which in turn will improve the environment. The given member has to improve only in its current position, as the reason for their weakness is the way they think and operate, and no external change will alter that. Changing the team is not an option, and also leaving the community is not an option. The problem, according to KH, is within the member, so even if the given member would leave the community, they will still have the same problems.

Members who wish to improve the condition of the environment and are willing to do all it takes to reach such improvement understand that only if they will stay in the community and improve their spirituality, despite all the difficulties they may have, commit to KH for the foreseen improvement of the environment and the earth that KH aims to achieve. With the understanding that no other place can provide them with the solution they are seeking, KH stays the ultimate group to be a part of.

5. Nature as a model for society

According to the community, human's spirituality affects the condition of nature. With that logic, KH believes that the current society is the reason that the natural environment is deteriorating, yet not only because of the extensive pollution and exploitation of natural resources but also because of the low spiritual level of humans, from which everything else stems from. They believe that the structure of the society is wrong and that changing the capitalist worldview of leaders around the world is the key to end the suffering of poor people, of animals, and to make a change for the better in nature. KH claims that the competitiveness of people is a self-destruction mechanism of society, and it should be thoroughly changed in order to live a more sustainable life and to improve the Earth's condition for future generations.

One of the stories that the community is basing their current approach towards society on is the story of when Jiiji was meditating and went out of his body. This experience of his took place prior to the foundation of KH when he was working in Komaki city and was practicing meditation for 1,000 days. The story, which was shared on the KH blog, is as follow:

[…] When he meditated one day, he moved out of his body. As if a rocket was launched, he rose higher and higher. Finally, he flew out into outer space.

He looked at the earth with the moon at his back. "How beautiful it is… The blue planet is floating in a cosmic space. It was miraculously beautiful. However, something like a keloid was seen here and there on this beautiful planet. They were traces of human activities such as cities and destroyed forests. They undermine the earth like skin cancer."

A thought of a strong confession came up within Jiiji's mind. "It is me, not someone else that has made the earth in such a state. The seed is inside of all humans. I will tell this truth as the one who has realized the true figure of the earth." Once he decided so in his mind, he was released from this cosmic space gradually, and returned to his body who was practicing meditation.[6]

While the story might suggest that it was the pollution made by human society that caused the massive destruction of the earth, KH believes that the fundamental change has to be

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[6] Retrieved from Konohana Blog: https://konohana-family-intl-blog.org/a-record-of-the-konohana-family/ 5 July 2021

the structure of the society. To improve it, they offer a new hierarchy between people, which they practice in their community.

5.1. Beehive model

On my second day at KH, a community tour was held. The tour is suggested to every new guest or volunteer coming to KH, together with the mandatory presentation about the community. One of the community members conducted the tour in a car, and the guests visited many of the community's facilities, including the green houses, the chicken coop, pottery studio, the community's fields which face Mount Fuji, the community's café – Lotus Land, and the beehive facilities. The member who is in charge of the beehive is Jiiji, while another member, Hikari, is helping him. When we arrived at the beehive facilities, our guide started to be more careful and hesitant about what she said in Japanese. She mentioned that we are about to meet a very special person who is also the founder of the community and has a very high spirituality. Although we did not know whether it was Jiiji or Hikari, the man or the woman, when we entered the facility, Jiiji's body language made it clear very fast. He was almost ignoring us when we came in, had a very serious face, and was almost un-naturally straight back. Our guide could not stop looking at him.

After our guide told us about the quantity of KH's honey production, Jiiji came up to us and asked our guide what she said in English, and so she told him in Japanese. He then invited us to sit down and asked Hikari to bring us samples of the honey they produce. Jiiji asked if any of us knew about how beehives operate. When we all said we did not know, he was smiling and jokingly said, "okay, so now I can say whatever I want," and we were all laughing. He started describing the beehive:

In the community, we have bees. They can give us their very best production. But more than their honey, I have an interest in the way they live. Now it's almost winter, and the bee population will decrease a lot until November. That's when I stop taking care of them. Now we do take care of them, we bring them sugar-water, and in February we'll start giving them also fruits, but until February, during winter we are not going to take care of them. […]. The climate of the earth is making it harder and harder to have bees.

When it comes to the hive itself, it is as follows: there is one queen, three or four males, and many worker bees. The queen doesn't really control the hive. She has only one role: to lay eggs. She is basically a slave of laying eggs. That's the role of her life. The role of the males is solely to fertilize the queen. That's all they do. The rest of the bees, which are also females, do not lay eggs. They only work. That is why there is a hierarchy in the hive. In cold months,

sometimes the worker bees expel the male bees away from the hive, and the male bees will die. That's the way it is. These male bees, even when they are kicked out of the hive – they don't complain. Also, the worker bees do not complain because they know they contribute to the universe.

We have the bees as a mirror to our human society. They even plan their population according to the season: if it will be good, they lay more eggs. It has been 24 years that KH exists and 23 years that I'm a beekeeper. That goes together with my history. I live according to nature. So I learn from the bees.

October 23rd, 2017

The metaphor of KH as a beehive was not clear to me right away, but only about two months into my research when I started to be exposed to more of KH practices and their beliefs about what a proper family structure is. However, all members know about this comparison and even recommended me to learn about it more. Although adjustments and alterations from the beehive structure were made in KH, they base their family structure on this form.

5.2. Family structure

The word "family" in KH has a very different meaning from what it has in the external society. While for most Japanese, a family contains one or two parents and one or more children, or simply a married couple, in KH, the family contains adult members and child members. This division between members determines the role in the community, duties and rights, and also points out who was joining the community out of their will and who was not.

While children are not required to work, when they finish high school, they are required to do so if they choose to stay in the community. All children who grew up in the community left and did not stay as adult members. One of the community children I interviewed said that she would not even consider staying as the adults work too hard and are "*tired all the time. They should rest more*". The reason she said that was because the adults are working seven days a week and do not get a day off. Even on the Japanese New Year, when adults are not working with their teams, they would still cook, clean, take care of the children, and the members who work in outdoor teams like a rice paddy, harvest and delivery would organize the main hall, hold various activities, and will be bound to the community's schedule, so they do not get to do other things or rest. The reason for the community to be operating seven days a week is said to be because they operate as nature does. They claim that nature does not rest once a week but operates continuously. In one of the community meetings, when one of the

international guests pointed out that he thinks that the community members always look tired and work too hard but do not rest enough, Jiiji laughed and answered: *"This is a brainwash from the society. What kind of nonsense is that? Does the sun say, 'oh, I don't want to shine today. I will take a day off'?. Do the bees take a day off? Their life is their work because that's how nature operates. And we, humans, are a part of nature too."*

The working hours are long and usually start from 7:00 AM, with a lunch break between 12:00 to 14:00, and then work again from 14:00 to 18:00, bath and dinner break, community meeting, and then team meetings. Adult members do not eat breakfast (except pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers) as they believe it is better for digestion to fast until noon. For most teams, the meetings would last until around midnight, while sometimes they would last even longer until 1:00 and 2:00. Some of the teams, like the Kitchen team and Lotus Land team, would start working around 4:00 in the morning. Members admit they are tired on various occasions. However, it is always accompanied by a shameful look on their face, an uncomfortable tone, or a sentence saying that they are bad for being tired. Most times they said that it was when other community members were not around. One time, I was asking one of the young adult members (32) in the interview if he is not tired and if he does not feel like sometimes he wants to rest. His response was, *"since I'm doing every day what I love, I don't feel like I need to rest"*. This whole interview was interpreted by one of the community members who speaks English. As I sensed the member was not genuine during the interview, I asked him to have a small "follow up" without an interpretation for a few simple questions, and he agreed. In the follow-up interview, I asked him a few technical questions like his work routine and whom he lives with in the room in his accommodation. When asking him if friends ever came to visit him in the community, he replied that one did and that this friend said it would be impossible for him to be a member because he needs his alone-time and time to rest, read a book or just travel. When I asked the young member if he also feels like he would like to read a book or travel some days, he replied that he would not do anything like that, but he just wants to have time to rest.

When asking Chio, the member who is in charge of interpretation and international guests in KH, whether she thinks the members work too hard and do not get enough time to rest, she replied: *"It's all a matter of spirituality. If our spirituality is low, we feel more tired and like we need more time to rest. But actually, it is only our spirit who is tired. Those who have higher spirituality don't need much time to rest and are always energetic"*. An international guest from Portugal who heard that said that the way he sees it, if that is the explanation, the community members do not have such a high spirituality because they look

tired all the time. To that, Chio replied, *"We don't. But we are on our way there. That is why we are a Village of Bodhisattvas. We are not enlightened yet, but we're on our way."*

Besides work, the adult members in a certain age have one more obligation towards the community and the society: to bear children. However, the community emphasizes that there should be careful considerations when becoming pregnant, as the parents' spirituality will determine the spirituality of the baby. Therefore, the community discusses the suitable match of two parents who are candidates for having a baby together and approve it or disprove the communion. Although the community members never discussed it openly, according to various resources, many of the community children are the biological descendants of Jiiji, as according to KH, one of the obligations of someone with a high spiritual level is to teach spiritually inferior persons what is the *right way* for a communion. That leads to the notion that marriage has no meaning in KH, and couples who have been married prior to their membership are expected to release all attachments to their partners and to start treating them as just another adult member of the community. There is no need for official divorce as KH members do not perceive formal documentation on this topic as significant.

When it comes to child-rearing, babies are breast-fed by their mothers until the age of six months, and then the child-rearing team takes care of them. From that point on, there should be no special relations between a biological child and their parents. I remember in particular one time when Hiroko, one of the community adult members, came to the main hall during lunch time, although she should have eaten in the other community house, Hontaku. One of the members was surprised to see her and asked her what she was doing there, and Hiroko replied that she needed to take her one-year-old child to the doctor. It was the first time in three months of my stay in the community that I saw Hiroko and her son together. She even looked a little uncomfortable with him, as if she was not sure what to do.

All the children call their parents by their first names, and I have never heard any child call any of the adults with the words *okaa-san* (mother) or *otoo-san* (father). Some of the children were not even sure who their father was, and in one interview, one of the community girls even told me that her father was Jiiji, then later that night, Jiiji himself told me that it was not true, but she is free to think so if she wishes to. On one occasion, when one of the community children showed me a photo album of the community, he pointed at his mother and said, "this is my mother". She looked much younger in the photos, so I did not recognize her. I asked the boy, *"and your father?"* (*otō-san wa*?), and he replied, *"there's no father"* (*otō-san inai*). I could not understand if his father was not in the picture or was not in the community

and did not continue asking questions for ethical reasons, yet clearly, this boy felt that his father did not exist in his life.

When the family structure of the community emphasizes what would be best for the community, some members are also engaged in other activities that should be beneficial for KH and the society, besides work and bearing children. One of the ways to do so is to be productive in creative work and activities like music, dance, acting, painting, sculpturing, pottery, sewing and the like.

5.3. KH art and creative activities

When a new guest visits the community, on the first evening, a "welcome concert" is held. In the concert, Konohana Band sings songs that were written by two community members (especially by one of them, Mariko), while the lyrics attempt to convey the essence of KH. Some songs contain lines like "I was lost before I got here", "now I am not lost anymore", "we can make this world a heaven", "we live on this planet together, what is our purpose here?", and "each one of us is a flower waiting to bloom". The first song is the "Welcome to Konohana Family" song. During this song, some adults carry some of the children on their shoulders and dance with them. Everybody is smiling and looking happy, and the children wave to the guests. The second song is sung by the community children. They have special dance moves, and they put on bee costumes. They also engage some of the babies of the community, put on a costume on them too, as if they 'participate' in the performance, and place them on the stage. This obviously resulted in comments such as "oh, how cute!" from the coming guests again and again (I participated in a large number of welcome concerts whenever a new guest arrived). The last song starts when only the band sings, and slowly the rest of the community join. The guests should also join, and at the end of the song, when everybody stands in a circle, hold hands together and sing.

When I asked Jiiji about the community songs, he said to me: "*Mariko used to be a professional singer before she joined the community. She had a partner, and they would perform together. They also performed here. I thought the words were really beautiful, but the way these two acted in life didn't match what they sang about. That's when I told Mariko: you should learn from your own songs! It's such an irony!*". According to the community, the songs are a divine outcome that was born out of a person's mind and is not related to that person's level of spirituality. In order to gain such a divine creation, sometimes communions are made. For the goodbye concert the community was holding for me, Mariko dedicated a

song to me called "all the rivers are pouring to the sea"[7]. Emi, Jiiji's secretary, told me that this song is very special and that I am very lucky to have this song dedicated to me. It is, after all, a song that was born after a communion between Mariko and Jiiji. A communion that she, Emi, and two other community members were witnessing. The theme of this song, and all the other songs of KH, deal with the ideal life in the community and in the world, how important it is to change the world, how much nature is important, how much being together is important, and how people can find their way after losing it.

But it is not only by songs that such messages are conveyed. The community also has an active theater that performs in front of the guests and members. They convey stories about the essence of life on this planet and how humans should behave. One of the plays I have seen was the story of one of the community members who had cancer. She was said to be very close to death and was hospitalized for more than 40 days. They said that her condition was so severe, they did a community survey on what to do with her body, as she was about to be the first community member who died, and they never decided what they should do in such cases. They already bought a coffin before there was a gradual improvement in her condition, and eventually, she came back to the community and is working up until this day. The theater play presents how much spirituality is important for the physical condition, as all the living things are interrelated, and if someone has a bad spirituality, all of their body's microorganisms will feel it and be dysfunctional until that person will get sick and die. That is the same process that happens when taking care of crops: if the spiritual level of the caregiver is low, the plants will get sick and die.

Besides the theater play, Jiiji also wanted me to interview that member that was healed from cancer. Although I made a list of interviewees according to their team, age, gender, the time they joined the family and their background story (as much as I knew), Jiiji asked me to switch one of them so I could hear this story of defeating cancer from this specific member herself. I agreed, and eventually, the member repeated the narrative of her story, which I have already seen in the theater play (although she did not participate in it), and did not add any further details. It almost felt like she was trying to make it as short as possible, and it was one of the shortest interviews I held. It felt like at that time, she was very sick and could not recall as much as the community did when talking about her story and presenting it in the play.

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[7] in Japanese: すべ ての川は海へと注ぐ

Creativity is also present in the community's art pieces they make and sell. They have a pottery studio, accessories made from lotus roots and other natural materials, and other art works. They sell these products in the shop attached to the Lotus Land café. However, they do not make such items solely for sale. Some of the art created is for the use of the community. One of the most well-known paintings is the drawing of KH called "A village of Bodhisattvas", painted by Mariko on the external wall of the Lotus Land (see figure 2). The painting shows the world in a lotus root shape and a colorful Mount Fuji at the top of it. There are multiple elements, like animals, humans, and some other shapes in various colors. A chain of DNA runs from the center of the earth to the surface, and the drawing is decorated by lotus flowers on the bottom, with one bee holding honey on the left side. All the elements of the earth are interrelated in the drawing as if to symbolize they all share the same planet and live there side by side together in peace. Without trying to interpret the drawing in a critical or philosophical way, it is clear that this drawing is a representation of KH's image as they see it. The members always referred to it as "beautiful" for what it symbolizes, yet it was never said that this drawing is beautiful for its colors, the painting skills of the painter, or the thought behind it.

Figure 2: "A village of Bodhisattvas". The painting on the external wall of Lotus Land, showing some of the narratives in KH.

Evaluating the art created in the community, whether it is singing, writing, acting, or drawing, is always on the basis of its contribution to the community. When telling a story that shows the importance of improving one's spirituality, making art objects that gain profit for the community, drawing a painting that shows the connectivity of all lives on earth when KH is in the center – will be highly evaluated. Although during my stay in KH, there were no

examples of when creative work was evaluated badly as it represented the community in a neutral or a bad way, it is assumed that this would be the case. Creative works in KH should always emphasize the connectivity and interrelated relations between all lives on earth and all humans. Just like in the welcome concert, when everybody should hold hands together, the idea behind every creative work is to try to make guests realize that to strengthen the connectivity with nature, they should join the community, as the unity of like-minded people in the field of environmentalism can only take place in a proper way in KH.

5.4. Summary

KH is said to be the one community that realized the importance of living with nature, as nature, and that fully understand and accomplish this way of life. Their role model is the beehive, of which they are said to live by. However, there are some limitations. As the bees indeed work seven days a week in some seasons, they do not work during winter, yet KH does. The bees also work only during the daytime as nature will not provide light during the night, yet KH members are working long after sunset, hold meetings, work in the office, the kitchen, clean, and take care of the community children. Also, while in the beehive, the queen is the only one to lay eggs, in KH, some couples can do so too (as long as it is approved by the community), and it is not a right that is reserved only to one member.

In fact, the norms of sexual communions in the community are not based on nature but rather on the belief of the members in spiritual development and the importance of expanding the community. Hence, it is proposed here that the community is only inspired by some ideas they encounter in the natural environment, yet they do not live by them. Needless to say, any way of life humans will choose to take will differ from those of animals and plants as no species live in the same exact way. For this reason, living as a beehive or any other creature will always be *inspired* by them only.

The idea of the connectivity of all elements in nature and the role of humanity and the community in such ideas is emphasized in the community's art, and creative work, such as writing and theater plays. These works will be evaluated by the community for their contribution to KH, which eventually determines whether these works increase the profit of KH, either in monetary value or human capital. When persuading new potential members to join the community via songs, plays, and drawings that emphasize that being one with nature and finding the purpose of life is only possible in KH, the number of working hands in the community grows, more income is generated, and therefore, the given art or creative work is considered as beautiful. However, KH's self-legitimacy and the belief that their way of life is

the ultimate utopian setting to live by are not derived solely from their observation of how well they achieve their goals. Their legitimacy is based on the fact that they are blessed and live according to the divine and that they are able to do so, thanks to the fact they have a divine authority in their community.

6. Divinity oriented environmentalism

There are countless communities and groups that offer solutions to environmental problems. Some of them are ecovillages, NPOs, grassroots movements and other organizations. Yet KH members are certain that the only place they can achieve their environmental goals and live in harmony with nature is in KH. Moreover, they believe that other people are either fraudsters, or they misunderstand what is *really* important, which is spiritual improvement under the guidance of a divine entity. The criticism over other communities and organizations is present and constant. During my stay in the community, I witnessed KH members and Jiiji criticize other communities, and the explanations for why other groups are wrong surrounds the fact that they do not have a divine entity to guide them as KH does.

The first time I heard such criticism was when a guest from an ecovillage in Finland presented her ecovillage community. After she finished her presentation, the community members asked her questions about what they do in their ecovillage in winter when it is snowy and what are the differences between KH and her ecovillage. She replied that in winter, they cannot grow many crops, so they mainly rest, and that one of the main differences is that her ecovillage does not have one member who is the leader and that they are all equal. To that, the community members replied that they believe that the role of humans is to work, so they see resting as a waste of time and that the lack of a leader is not something positive in their eyes, as Jiiji is a divine being and he can adjust the ways the community operates as he communicates with the divine.

On another occasion, one Japanese guest I worked with in the kitchen was saying, "*it is so special here. There's probably no other agricultural community like that in Japan, I guess.*" One of the members heard that and replied, "*Actually, there is a similar community, that's the Yamagishi. But you see, they are different. They've been here [in KH] before. They came to learn from us. They are agricultural-based, and they have their own beliefs, but as they came here to learn from us about our spirituality, you can see that something there is missing.*"

A third occasion in which I heard criticism about other communities was by Jiiji. After a guest from Tamera, one of the largest communities in Europe, presented his community, Jiiji made a long comment. He said that Tamera's leader, although considered a very high spiritual being, does not understand what is really important. He said that the sexual affairs in Tamera are very shallow, as they do not consider the spirituality of both partners. What kind of communion could it possibly be then, he asked. Here, he continued, KH considers the spirituality of all members, and that is the most important thing. In KH, sexual affairs are not

done merely for physical pleasure but for a higher purpose. That is why, in Jiiji's words, Tamera has a lot to learn from KH.

In these three cases, the difference between KH and all other communities is said to be in the role, perception, and importance of spirituality. Although some other environmental communities do have their own perception of spiritual matters, beliefs and practices, to KH, the only place that grasps the meaning of spirituality and the ways and methods to improve it correctly is KH itself. No other community has the legitimacy to claim they understand spiritual matters, and as a consequence, they cannot claim they are understanding nature and helping it thrive as KH does. KH's self-legitimacy and their monopoly over spirituality are rooted in the fact that only KH has direct communication with the divine, and the only member in the community who executes this daily communication is Jiiji, the spiritual leader of KH.

6.1. A divine leader

Furuta Isami, known as Jiiji, was born in Mino-city, Gifu Prefecture, in 1951. He claims that his ancestors were village leaders in the Edo period, and his father was a local politician. He got married when he was 21, and at the age of 25, he and his wife founded an interior design company in Komaki city, Aichi Prefecture. They were running the company until he established Konohana Farm in 1994. Jiiji states that at the age of nineteen, his late grandmother's spirit came to *sit above his head permanently* [his words] and was always with him, protecting him. Eleven years later, his grandmother's spirit disappeared, and instead, a fifty-year-old Indian male took her place. Later he discovered it was Siddhārtha Gautama, the historical Buddha and founder of Buddhism. During that time, Jiiji had an out-of-body experience in which his spirit took Buddha's body. Then, he came to realize that he switched bodies with Buddha, and Buddha was constantly seeing through his eyes and speaking through his mouth. When he was working in his interior design business, Jiiji could recognize his clients' problems and gave them his insights and advice, as Buddha was speaking through his mouth. At that time, Jiiji learned a technique in which he could know people's karma[8]. The karma is, according to KH, the Yin and Yang tendencies of a person and their capacity to realize the reality in which they live. Via this technique, Jiiji could analyze peoples' names by their kanji strokes[9].

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[8] In this thesis, karma indicates what KH members refer to as karma. Please see this paper's glossary.

[9] Name analysis in Japan is not unique to KH, and is known by the name *kanji no kakusū ni yoru seimeihanda* (漢字の画数による姓名判断), which is judgment the first name and last name by counting the kanji strokes.

After Jiiji's out-of-body experience mentioned in chapter 4, he felt he had the responsibility for the damage caused to the earth by humanity and that he had to act in order to improve it. Then, suffering from a lack of understanding by his wife and parents, Jiiji continued to talk about his experiences and the *truth* which he had discovered in his spiritual journey, and gradually some people started gathering in his office, home, or other people's homes every evening to listen to him talk about his experiences and interpretations to events currently happening in the world. He said he was very lonely at that time, and just like the biblical Jonah, Jiiji had a hard time accepting the path that was decided for him by the divine. He says that it was hard for him to put aside his *"ego and the gain-and-loss calculation and intentions."* However, he could not stop what he was doing as he realized the importance of his path.

One of the founding members of the community recalled this period when various people gathered in Jiiji's office and in other people's houses every evening to hear him speak:

In the beginning, Jiiji was always in the center, and many people were around him. Buddha's teaching was like that. When Buddha was still with Jiiji, that was a relationship like Jiiji and Buddha are friends. But when Jiiji turned 40 years old, Buddha left, and the divine (kami) came in. It has changed. After a while, when it was the time of the divine, we started to gather as a group. One day we had a meeting in Taki shrine. From there, we had a new start. Soon after that, about three years later, we made the decision to go to Mount Fuji together.

[…] regarding the number of people that would gather at that time […], it was about five or six people in about this size room [6 tatamis]. It was Jiiji's living space, and we were watching television together and then talking about different values issues. […]. Nothing specific. It was more like, 'today this and that has happened…'.

January 22nd, 2018

At the age of 39, Buddha's spirit left Jiiji, and he started encountering Shinto gods and goddesses (kami); the first was Amaterasu Ōmikami. After this encounter, a voice told Jiiji to climb to the summit of Mount Fuji before the sunrise, and when he was there, he received this message from Amaterasu Ōmikami: *"Preach the spirit that you have learned and mastered from the divine to the whole land under the sun[10] from now on."* That was the time when he

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[10] "The whole land under the sun" is a translation of *hinomoto no kuni* (日の本の国). First Jiiji thought the meaning was "everyone in Japan", but later he admitted he was wrong in his interpretation, and noted that the meaning was that he should preach to "the whole world".

realized he should teach others how to go through the process which he went through, what he would eventually call "to polish the heart" (*kokoro wo migaku* 心を磨く).

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

In the previous house, we didn't even have an electric ofuro (bath). We had to use firewood. The toilet was outside, and there was no ceiling there. In the ofuro, we used the fire wood to heat the bath water, and it was on the second floor, where people lived. It was so smoky... the previous house was an old-style Japanese house. It was as if makkuro-kurosuke would come out of everywhere. It was such an old house. If you'd go up the stairs, it would squeak. That was the first house. So when we moved to Hontaku, it was like a ryokan for us.

February 19th, 2018

Hontaku, the first community house KH purchased, was about to become one property out of many, including fields, warehouses and greenhouses.

Jiiji was the founder of the community, and as such, he had his way of how things should be done. First, members had to act like a family, and the first step towards it was to share all of their money and assets. Although it did not happen immediately, members sold their houses and their belongings and gave this money to the community. Some members were reluctant to do so, and after a while, they left the community and moved back to Komaki city. Jiiji himself closed his business and sold his house. He has two daughters with his wife, and he told them he will not take care of them financially from now on. One of his daughters came to live with the community but left when she got married and had a child after her husband had a disagreement with Jiiji and ended up law suiting Jiiji and the community. Eventually, all members who stayed in the community were those who were willing to commit financially to KH. Yet sharing money and assets was only one step: members were also expected to share everything they thought and to have no secrets from anyone in the community. Jiiji did not

allow members to talk behind one's back, and whenever he discovered such a situation occurred, he would gather all members, and they discussed it together, opening all of their thoughts and expressing their feelings.

Even after the establishment of the community, Jiiji was constantly delivering messages he had received from the divine to the members. In the beginning, he was the only member who could communicate with the divine, and throughout the time, a few more members who were, to some extent, gifted with such abilities joined the community. Still, they are considered to be inferior in their communication with the divine and their observation and comprehension of spiritual matters compared to Jiiji, and he is always the sole authority that can perfectly understand divine entities and their will. Jiiji's understanding and theories about how the world operates are said to be based on the long-years connection he has with the divine, as he is believed to see things that other people cannot see or understand. He can deliver the reasoning for why some circumstances or incidents occur through his understanding that all lives on earth are connected. According to him, humans are those who make this world a better or a worse place, and he should be the one to guide them towards creating a better world. He is very appreciated by the members not only by his spiritual path but also by his professional understanding and work in organic agriculture, and it is said that this is due to his complete understanding of the natural world. One of his nick-names in the community is Mister Universe[11].

The communication of Jiiji with the divine is believed by all members and was never disputed or questioned. They often cite him when educating the children to behave (for example: "Isadon says that when you hold your hands like that you are not honest with yourself. Stop doing this!"), when explaining to the guests what the community believes in ("Isadon says that when talking about spirituality, never take money"), and when talking to each other ("Isadon says that we should first observe and only then operate"). The reference to Isadon's words and the acceptance of the stories he tells is natural to the members, including super-natural phenomena that occurred to him. It is as natural to the members as it is natural that nature operates the way it does without having an explanation for how it happens. In the same way, without understanding how it happens, members believe that Jiiji has a profound communication with the divine. They automatically accept the fact that he is right in what he

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[11] These words are said in English with Japanese pronunciation: ミスターユニバース.

says, as he conveys the will of the divine, which is something that members believe that they would also be able to hear if they will only *get over their ego*.

6.2. The divine will

In KH, members believe that most of their problems in life are rooted in what they call *their ego*. All of their ideas, wishes, and thoughts are just a manifestation of their ego, and once they are free from it, they will be empty, and then they can make space to hear the divine. They believe everything happens regardless of their own personal will, in the way that was decided by the divine, and humans should only fulfill the role that was chosen for them. Sometimes members refer to the *divine will* as "the natural flow" or "things naturally happen". However, these expressions always refer to the *divine will*.

One of the members explained to me the transition he was going through since he joined the community:

When I just came here, I thought so many things: "I want to change that", "this should be changed like that". I thought a lot and suggested a lot, but almost all these things just came out from my own preference or my fixed worldview. At that time, things didn't change. My personality, which was the source of these suggestions, was the problem. I received this feedback from other members. Now when I reflect on that period of time, things gradually change, and it goes in the direction I hoped it would go. And it all happens although I didn't say a word, it just goes in this direction because of the flow.

The water will always flow from a high place to a low place. There is no situation when the opposite happens. So that means that if you'd just leave it, this world will surely go in a better direction. Even now, I have some thoughts like, "oh, I wish this part will become like this…", but the difference between the time I came here and now is that now I am aware of the flow. Even if I say something or suggest something, there is the best timing to do it. Now I know that even without saying anything, things are moving in a certain direction anyway. And also, now I know my wishes are not always correct. The answer is that things are becoming what they should become anyway, and also, I understand that this is the best way. That's why I observe, and that's why it doesn't matter if I wish for something or not. The thing I'm certain about is that the divine values this community highly and protects it, and the divine is gradually guiding us in the best direction.

February 6th, 2018

The person whom I heard about *the divine will* from the most was Jiiji. His explanations about the *divine will* are divided into three main themes. The first theme was "humans' ego", which roughly tries to portray the tension between humans' *ego* and the journey to be released from it (in Japanese: *jiga wo koeru*). Here is the explanation in Jiiji's words:

Humans have ego, so they prioritize themselves. That's why we have conflicts and confusion. The divine gave humans ego, and at the same time, the divine gave us the system of getting over the ego. This is a game given to humanity. If you lose in the game, you are tended by the ego. And once I found out this is the game of the divine, I won't lose, and then the divine says: okay, we are equal. Humans never win. They can either be equal or lose, one of the two, since the divine always wins. It is nice when you reach this mental state. But sometimes I say the divine "you've created humans, so it means you are the humans" parent, and such humans are in such a state, so it is actually the parent's responsibility'.

[...] I said it to the divine, but the divine said that it created humans by dividing itself so humans can understand the systems of themselves in this world. [...] My role is to give humans the information straight away. However, I control how strongly I talk to the person, depending on the person. That's why the divine created this world. That's why I said [to the divine], "as a parent, you are so bad," and the divine said, "that's right, but without humans in this world, what am I to do?" so it's just a game. So it's better to understand that this is a game.

Jiiji's explanation of the divine as an entity that differs from humans, but at the same time, a part of humans is his proof that humans and nature are one, as the divine is in every living creature. Humans are, as Jiiji said, the only species who have an ego, and that is the reason for the massive destruction of nature done by people in the last few centuries. He is both blaming the divine for it but also accepts that it is a game of the divine. The reason Jiiji accepts it is rooted in the second theme for his explanations of the divine.

According to Jiiji, the divine has its own will, and everything that happens is planned by the divine. Even when negative incidents happen, although people may wonder what the contribution of such an event is, it all happens for a reason only the divine can understand. Whenever Jiiji was explaining to me things that happened in the community or to members and ended up in a negative manner, he always referred to the *divine will*. Even when one of the members was suffering from a violent partner prior to her enrollment in the community, Jiiji referred to her problematic partner as a "divine messenger", as he made this member reach her ultimate goal in life: to join KH. This was the divine's plan for her. He was also referring to Hitler as a "high spiritual Bodhisattva", as according to Jiiji, Hitler was doing the job nobody

else wanted to take on themselves in order to teach humans what is the bad way they should not turn to. This belief that even bad things happen because the divine has an arrangement that humans cannot understand is common in KH. However, it is better for members to get over their ego, make themselves empty and listen to the *divine will*. When they cannot do this, because they feel they are still not mature enough spiritually, they turn to the person who has direct communication with the divine: Jiiji.

His third theme for explaining the divine is referring to himself as an entity that is only a tool for the divine to use, as the divine is speaking through him as a living shrine. Members understand that there is a very clear spiritual hierarchy in the community and that having Jiiji standing at the top of this hierarchy is indisputable. Whenever they have difficulties, they turn to the community's divine messenger to help them. Also, when there is a decision to be made in order to operate according to the *divine will*, Jiiji will always be involved. On one occasion, Jiiji announced at the community meeting that KH is about to purchase land behind Lotus Land, which would be an extension to the kitchen. He explained that it is necessary because recently there have been many international guests, care guests (participants in the natural therapy program), and new members and that the kitchen of the Lotus Land is very small and the members who work there have very little space for their breaks. He mentioned that Lotus Land is important for the community as a place to spread their values, and the community is important to the society, so they have to do their best for KH to continue growing. The land would cost around 10,000,000 JPY, and he already negotiated with the landowner, who would not reduce the price because he has debts. Jiiji also announced that because the community had many expenses this year, the contract will be signed in January. It was Jiiji who negotiated with the landowner and eventually decided to buy the land. When I asked some members if they knew about the issue of buying the land, they said they did, but they had no idea about the details like price or the content of the negotiation, but only after it was decided. They trust Jiiji that he will fulfill the *divine will*. He is the one who got over his ego after being a disciple of Buddha for nine years, and therefore he is empty and can receive messages from the divine.

As the community tries to operate according to the *divine will*, the members who can communicate with the divine often share their experiences with those who cannot. The decision-making process, like the one described above, is one example of it. Decisions in the community are said to be a consequence of mutual agreement that is achieved through discussions in the community meetings, and sometimes it is said to be decided by a non-verbal perception of the natural flow between members. Yet, in many cases, this non-verbal communication ends up in a decision that is made by those who communicate with the divine.

When it comes to spiritual decisions that might contradict other values of the community, such as environmental values, those who can listen to the *divine will* are asked to find a solution on behalf of the whole community.

6.3. Priorities being made

When attempting to live in a sustainable way, whether it is as an individual or a community, some practices require compromises. These compromises could be working longer hours, spending more money, or giving over some activities which harm the environment or are simply not sustainable or ethical. While almost all the activities we make have some impact on the environment, every individual or community that lives modern life needs to make decisions on these compromises. As the values of KH are said to be "making this world a better place" socially, but also environmentally, and they are a community that takes great pride in their low ecological footprint, it was surprising for me to see that some of their practices contradict what is commonly known as unsustainable practices. Yet when the main reason for practicing environmentalism is to fulfill a spiritual goal, compromises are easier to be made.

In KH, Selling organic products is not merely the outcome of environmental concerns and one of the community's main income sources but also a means to spread KH's beliefs and values. Therefore, the community sees great importance in improving their spirituality in order for the production to be of high quality. In order to transcend positive energy and make better products, members often chant Katakamuna (will be explained in chapter 6) while working in the fields, kitchen, warehouses, and other places. Then, growing healthy, organic, and delicious-looking food is equivalent to spreading their spiritual beliefs and practices to the external society, a mission they highly evaluate. Since the distribution of their values and spiritual beliefs takes priority, other practices that might contradict environmentalism might be executed. If, for example, organic food needs to be delivered in one-time-use plastic packages, the end justifies the means.

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

> *[…] My tendency is to be very extreme. I'm often told that I am a person of either 0 or 100. Nothing in between. That's why when I think about things – I don't have anything in the middle. So I have lived my life always using nothing at all or using a lot! KH is flexible. According to the need, we change. So talking about the plastic lunch boxes, we are going to make it as good as we can and do the best we can do. So rather*

than doing workshops here for a few people, if we're doing lunch boxes for hundreds of people, KH values would be better distributed. It is easier to understand our values like that.

Not doing that for the reason that we might create plastic pollution is not good. We will make lunch boxes on any opportunity we have. And then, on other occasions, you can have this kind of food in A-UN [a monthly soba restaurant event that the community is holding] and at Lotus Land. Both of them are the same food. If I start to think, "we produce so much garbage", this is my ego talking. That's why it's bad to refrain from plastic usage because by using it, we can distribute our values. We distribute our values via delicious lunch boxes. When I reflect back over myself, what I have done by saying "I won't pollute the earth" – that was very superficial.

February 21st, 2018

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

A serious concern for pollution is shown in a different area: pollution of the body. KH is striving to eliminate the consumption of foods that contain "bad energy", in particular: meat and fish. The community considers the stressful experiences of animals while being slaughtered to be the cause of bad energy in meat and fish since this energy makes the body unhealthy, in their perspective. They also assert that the intestines of Japanese people are one meter longer than any other nation, which according to KH, causes the meat to stay longer in their bodies and rot, and that it is the cause for various diseases. The ultimate verification that meat should not be consumed was made by Jiiji. He said that in one of his out-of-body experiences, in which he was flying in space and watching the earth, he noticed the earth was surrounded by sad souls of dead animals killed for the food industry. The food should be produced in a harmless way and to be appreciated by its eater before it is consumed. Therefore, in KH, all food should be consumed after praying in silence for at least one minute and saying *itadakimasu* a few times. Yet the community is raising chickens for egg consumption and manure, while the old chickens are sold to a chicken dealer. According to one of the members, *"the dealer is probably using the old chickens to feed carnivores in a zoo."* The chickens are also bought from the dealer by the community. When I asked what this dealer is doing with

male chicks, as they are usually killed in the chicken industry since this commodity has no use, the community member said she does not know. Therefore, it might be that although KH is against killing animals, it contributes to this industry by buying from others who kill animals. My questions did not seem to bother the members I talked to, suggesting that even if this practice of killing male chicks is done by someone who is not a part of the community, it is not as severe as a member would do it in the community facilities.

Another aspect of contradiction related to food in the community is that they do not buy milk for self-consumption. However, they do consume it for the food and drinks offered in their café. Then, although another member said she was working in the milk industry and was not happy with the treatment the cows had received, here too, the means for financial profit are prioritized over the care for animal welfare in the food industry, which the community is said to be concerned by. On another occasion, most of the community members went to visit a zoo, and some stayed to work. I also stayed with another international guest. When he was asked why he would not visit the zoo, he said that he thinks that healthy animals should not be kept in cages, so he would not like to support zoos. The members he was speaking to perceived his words as criticism of the community, and throughout lunch that day, they had a discussion about this topic while one of the members translated to each party to help them understand each other. Despite the fact that the conversation ended with mutual agreement that nobody is perfect and everybody tries to do their best, and that is the most important thing, on the same evening, one of KH members who took part in the discussion at lunch chose to bring this topic up again during the children meeting that evening. The international guest was attacked by other community members, particularly by Mariko, who defended the community and said this is the best place in the world, and everybody knows that. She also mentioned that the community is deciding to do everything they do after giving it a lot of thought and that, in general, they are very liberal. She continued for a few minutes and had a very angry tone. After she was speaking, other members, one by one, attacked the international guest, although there was nobody to properly translate what they were saying. When they finished, they asked him if he wanted to say anything, and as he could not speak proper Japanese, and I could not translate his ideas thoroughly, he simply said he was unable to say what he thinks. This situation, which was solved at lunchtime, was brought back up again to justify the community's practices and to strengthen all members' belief that the community will always do what is right as it is the most highly spiritual place in the world.

The community's priorities always evaluate spirituality and spiritual improvement as their main goal. However, it is important to note that financial gains and leisure are also highly

evaluated, higher than environmental objectives. When the community needs to choose between increasing their sales in their café, wrap their production in a way that will be more appealing to their customers, saving time by not washing lunch-boxes, producing plastic pollution for selling their food, killing chickens and chicks for having eggs and more diversity in their café's menu, and promoting locking down healthy animals for their leisure – they choose what would be the best for the financial benefits of the community, saving time, and also leisure. Although these are practices that are very common in modern society, in a community where environmental improvement is one of its main objectives, one would expect these practices to be avoided. When they are not, the question of the significance of environmentalism in the community is raised.

6.4. Summary

KH claims to be an environmental-oriented community as it was decided in their establishment. The person who introduced the environmental ideas, including organic agriculture, vegetarian diet, and self-sufficiency, was Jiiji. Yet, he also introduced other ideas that are supposedly resonating with environmentalism, such as: living with and by nature, being one with nature and the divine, and living according to the *divine will*. These ideas integrate environmentalism and the community's spiritual beliefs. When the source of all of the community's beliefs and practices rely on one person, in cases where a contradiction between two values is raised, this one person is also expected to be the one that will suggest an appropriate solution.

When spirituality is at the highest priority in the community and is a means to improve the state of the world in every aspect (environmental aspect included), strengthening the community and spreading the values it carries to as many people as possible takes the highest priority. The practical ways to achieve this goal are to expand the community and to raise the number of working hands involved in it, to gain more financial power to be able to have more facilities that will support the community's targets and to increase the familiarity of the community so that more people will know about its existence. In order to do so, all means are valid. When these means include pollution, unsustainable practices, being involved with animal killing, although it contradicts some of the other values of the community, these sacrifices should be made for the sake of the community's existence and expansion, although it might contradict other values that the community is said to hold.

The way to justify contradiction mostly leans on the *divine will*, which leads people and situations to operate in a certain way regardless of humans' will and is equivalent to faith in

other beliefs. Although members are said to reach decisions by a community consensus, they also report trying to *empty* themselves from their own thoughts and feelings and not being *attached* to their own ideas so they can listen to the *divine will*. Members that find it difficult to listen to the *divine will* should ask the advice of other members that can listen to this voice and will suggest an appropriate solution. These members are very few, and Jiiji is at the top of their hierarchy. Furthermore, those who can listen to the *divine will* are closer to Jiiji, as they are perceived as having higher spirituality.

Considering the decision and priority making process in the community, the importance of environmentalism is significantly lower than spirituality and its spread. In fact, as environmentalism derives from spirituality, the hierarchy is clear, and the decisions made in this regard will always be in favor of spiritual improvement, spreading its importance, and increasing the strength of the community. If any member opposes a decision that puts environmentalism values as inferior to spirituality, their stand can be easily dismissed as they will be said to have a problem with their ego. After all, all members have a lower spiritual level compared to Jiiji, so they cannot know better than him. Yet, Jiiji repeatedly urges members to increase their own spiritual level so they will be decent spiritual partners for him and will make such decisions of putting the spirituality first, on their own. One of the ways he tries to achieve this wish of his is to educate members in spiritual matters, as well as guests and other non-members that show interest in KH's beliefs.

7. Appreciation of wild education

KH holds various beliefs regarding the creation of the world, the way it operates, life and death, and the way society should operate. As these beliefs differ greatly from those of the Japanese society and combine both unique beliefs and borrowed ones, members who join the community, as well as guests who come for a visit, are asked to be educated about the community's perception of the world. In their view, in order to understand the community and why it operates the ways it does, it is crucial to understand the world as they see it. Otherwise, it may seem like KH is "a kind of cult" (in one of the members' words). In the community, they believe that once the guest or member learns about the *truth* (will be further explained in this chapter), they will see that KH is the best place on earth to live in and to improve the condition of both humans and nature.

The difference between KH and the external society regarding education also plays a role in their attitude towards the official education system. Although the children of the community do attend public schools, and most of them finish 12 years of education as most Japanese, they are not encouraged to continue their studies on to university unless it can contribute to the community. On one occasion, one of the community girls was telling the adults she is having a hard time studying for the entrance examination for high school, and she is very depressed as she needs to study a lot since she skipped many classes during junior high. The adults then asked her why she was trying so hard to do something she did not like to do and advised her to reconsider taking the examination, as high school is not mandatory in Japan. The girl ended up not going to high school and was working in the community until my visit when she was 18 years old. Although this case is unique in the community, and most of the children do finish high school, it shows the attitude of the community towards the education system in Japan and its importance in their eyes.

On another occasion, I also witnessed first-hand the attitude of KH towards the official education system. It was one of my first times to meet Jiiji, and while he was speaking and explaining things to me, I was writing the notes in my notebook. He then said that this way of learning is useless and that this is robotic. He continued and said that the education system is trying to make us such – robots – and that I was going to become one too if I continued to write like this. In our next meetings, I recorded his talk and transcribed it later, so his attention will not be distracted by the fact I take notes. As recording Jiiji is very common in KH, and members do it often, he did not pay much attention to the recording machine. Another example of Jiiji's attitude towards education were his words: *"I don't need to prove anyone anything, as I am not*

a part of this system. I never went to university, and everything I learned, I learned from the divine"; "if you learn only in school, you cannot understand the importance of these things. There is no textbook for learning such things. This information was given to me by the divine."
As the teachings of lessons from the divine are highly evaluated by Jiiji, and as a consequence, by KH members, it is only natural that this will be at the core of their community education and what they hope that guests and members will learn when staying in KH.

7.1. Katakamuna learning

During my stay in KH, Jiiji was holding quite a few presentations regarding the community's beliefs, especially the Katakamuna, a belief that was introduced to KH in 2014 by a teacher specializing in it. The members claimed that after a few classes, they realized that they understood the Katakamuna a lot better than this teacher and therefore dismissed him and developed their own learning materials. Then, they started developing the Katakamuna theory based on the previous teacher's materials and explanations, eliminated some of his interpretations, added their own, and expanded it. The original theory of the Katakamuna is based on the myth that 13,000 years ago, Japan was inhabited by people called the Katakamuna People, who, according to KH, are the ancestors of nowadays Japanese. People of this civilization could sense the potential of a phenomenon prior to its existence. Therefore, in the Katakamuna theory, there is a constant tension, dependence, and interaction between *the potential world* and *the phenomena world* (see figure 3), which will be further explained in the next paragraph. The vibrancy of the potential world could be sensed by the Katakamuna people, and they classified these vibrations into 48 sounds (syllables), which are said to represent the system by which the universe is operated: the universal structure of creation, development, and disappearance. It is said that for many years the Katakamuna theory was hidden from humans because they were far from a spiritual state that could support the understanding of the Katakamuna, but in 1949, a physicist named Narasaki Satsuki[12] discovered the Katakamuna and revealed its' mystery during five years of research.

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[12] In Japanese: 楢崎皐月

The Universal System from the viewpoint of "*Katakamuna*"

- Non-existence
- Existence that exists
- Potential World — God (*KAMU*) — Fire — Phenomenal world — Forms (*KATA*) + Water
- Invisible world — visible world +
- World of Vibrancy
- World of Life — Natural beautiful distortion = Life network
- Vibrancy of 48 Sounds, God, Soul, Mouth Soul of sounds & numbers
- GATE
- To be born
- Thoughts, Spirits, Mind, Soul of language
- Artificial Distortion = Karma — Phenomena, Forms, Manifestation, Body, Actions, Soul of forms
- Source of Life
- Seeds of Life (Information)
- Emergence of Life
- To return
- Qualitative shift (*NA*)
- World without distortion, turn, turbidity
- World with distortion, turn, turbidity
- Artificial Method
- Natural Circulation
- Universal Circulation Method

Figure 3: the explanation provided by KH for the shifts between the *potential world* and the *phenomena world* and vice versa.

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

Each of the 48 syllables that are said to create the vibrancy of the *potential world* has a meaning (see appendix 1). There are eighty chants that KH is familiar with. One of them is chanted daily by the community members, while others are chanted on special occasions. KH doctrines note that most of the Katakamuna chants are regarding sexual relations between men and women. The sounds are parallel to the Japanese katakana sounds, and therefore, by looking at the meaning of the syllables of the Katakamuna, it is possible to analyze Japanese words and names, and indeed KH uses the Katakamuna to analyze people's personalities by their names to help them heal the parts of their personality that have *distorted sounds* (in Japanese: *tenten*).

The community members mostly say Katakamuna chants numbers 5 and 6[13]. Some of the consequent syllables in the chant have a meaning in Japanese, for example: *"hi fu mi yo i"*, an old Japanese counting for one-two-three-four-five, although not in use anymore in modern Japan, and *"ma wa ri te me ku ru"*, meaning "seasons are changing". The members, adults and children, chant numbers 5 and 6 before their meetings. The members explain that children should chant it too since it develops their pineal gland, so every child in the community is required to chant as soon as he or she can developmentally do so. Adults also chant when they work, when fermenting microorganisms, and sometimes on random occasions. They believe that chanting *adjusts the atmosphere* of their meetings and work, so it will be successful and fruitful, and that *everyone and everything will have one mind and heart.*

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

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

January 17th, 2018

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

> *It's a very broad worldview... What can I say? KH itself got to know the Katakamuna, and since then, our capacity has expanded. I understand that this is something important, but I still didn't grasp it well enough.*

January 23, 2018

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

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[13] The community has a book that all the 80 Katakanuma chants are written in. Each chant has a number.

Although some members do not know well about the Katakamuna, they do understand that it is important and that by practicing it, their spiritual level and the harmony in the community can improve, as well as they can vibrate positive energies to other living beings. Communicating via sounds to other members of the community before meetings, to microorganisms, and to the crops while working in the fields is a way of strengthening the oneness of all living things. When doing so, members believe that humans understand their initial role in the ecosystem and in nature. They strive to revive the Katakamuna civilization's values, and to eventually live in accordance to *the potential world*, the world of *kamu*, the divine, and by doing so to live in accordance with the *divine will* and make this world a better place. Then, when the *divine will* is fulfilled, they believe they will live as the utopian Katakamuna civilization did, in harmony with fellow human beings, animals, nature, all forms of life, and the world of the *kamu*. To understand how this goal could be fully achieved and what are the best practices to fulfill their wishes, Katakamuna classes and workshops are often held in the community.

7.2. Mind and body healing

Not only do the adults participate in lectures about spiritual matters, but the children of the community do so too. Jiiji is holding presentations for the children of the community to teach them what the beliefs of the community are based on and techniques to analyze their and other peoples' personalities. In one of the children's presentations I attended, Jiiji was teaching the children to analyze names by the technique *karma reading*. Jiiji is said to receive the knowledge of analyzing peoples' karma by Buddha, who was guiding Jiiji at the time, as written in detail in KH blog. It is said that when he was 30-year-old and encountered Buddha, this has happened:

> *Jiiji began to care about people's names irresistibly. Many names surged into him like a flood from one to the next. On the third day, he could not sleep at night, could not stand it anymore and screamed involuntarily at dawn, "Wooooow!" At that moment, a line was drawn between the first letter of the name and the second one. He could see this showed some kind of law.*

> *This is the beginning of "karma reading." Names marvelously show unique forms of human minds (karma) which are different from person to person with the law of yin and yang.*

He went to various houses and businesses every day, and mysterious matters began to happen there too. [...]. Then, he came to give advice to people. When he started to talk, what he had never heard of, came out of his mouth. It was not his words but the words of Buddha who entered him. Jiiji was always outside of himself, listened to Buddha's words and learned from them.

(Retrieved from KH Blog, on October 28, 2018)

For the first 30 minutes of the meeting, Jiiji was speaking of his spiritual journey and how dedicated he was to improve his spirituality. When he was talking about his out-of-body experience, some of the girls screamed, *"that's awesome!"*. In reply, he said: *"if you would also practice meditation for 1,000 days, you can also have such experience."* After explaining the theory, how he received this knowledge from Buddha, and after teaching the main principles of how to do it technically, he was analyzing each child-member in the room and some adults that were not present at the time. This is the way Jiiji was analyzing the personality of one of the community's 15-year-old girls:

[...] She can see in objective matters, but her capacity is kind of small, so she doesn't think deeply. [...] she thinks a lot, but she is passive, and she tends to think in a negative way. She has many worries, so if she goes out into society, she might get depressed. [...] she thinks a lot, and thinking is a burden for her. If she receives good advice, though, she can be smart, so it was good for you [talking to the girl] to encounter Jiiji. We complete each other, so the relationship is very good. So you and I are spiritual partners, and if you want to utilize your life, it is a good partnership. Otherwise, you would just stop going to school, right? So this was a fatal encounter.

Jiiji was reminding the girl that when her mother joined the community, the girl was suffering from bullying at school, and hence she decided to not attend school anymore. Her mother asked Jiiji for advice, and he was talking to the girl and helped her talk to her classmates and to put an end to the bullying. He also said that the fact that now she is appreciated by her classmates is a result of her conversations and guidance by Jiiji, so she is lucky to encounter him.

Then Jiiji continued to analyze another girl's personality: *she thinks in a negative way, and she has a kind of inferiority complex [...].* In a way, every child receives an interpretation of their personality, what their weaknesses are, and what they should do to overcome these weaknesses. The solutions were mainly: working for others, staying in the community, and

maintaining a tight relationship with Jiiji. Yet, the main objective of the meeting was teaching the children the techniques KH uses to analyze the personalities of other people. Indeed, on future occasions, some of the children told the adult members that they analyzed other peoples' personalities and that by doing so, they could understand why these adults are operating in a way that is not good for society. Yet while the children are mainly required to know their own personality and work on their weaknesses, these are the adult members that are asked to also act in order to overcome their weaknesses, so they will be able to improve their spirituality.

Adult members are assessed by their efforts to overcome their weaknesses that are said to be derived from their ego, which leads to undesired attachments. Besides the presentations Jiiji is holding for adult members regarding the theories (or in KH words: *the truth*) behind the community beliefs and practices, the community also holds special ceremonies and occasions once in a few years. According to KH, the spiritual level of the members can be increased via sacred or beautiful intercourse, and the community was practicing a sex-purification ceremony (*sei-misogi*) around 2014. When talking about the ceremony, Jiiji explained to me that he was teaching the members what beautiful sex and what polluted sex are on several occasions during this ceremony which lasted a few weeks. At that time, Jiiji was asking some female and male members of KH to write down their sexual history. Some of them shared what they wrote in the community meetings to analyze their sexual behavior and to prevent them from practicing *polluted sexual behavior*. Whoever was engaged in polluted sex way of thinking and behaving, like doing sex out of urge without considering the spiritual meaning behind it, was severely criticized and punished by Jiiji. Some of the punishments were even physical. A current member recalled it as follow:

> *[…] in order to correct people's perception, Jiiji was hitting people often.[…] Since it was so very important – that is why. A person who is violating this importance and making things dirty; these people were hit until Jiiji's hand hurt – it happened so many times.*

> February 10th, 2018

Another member described it as follows:

> *Now, on the internet, it is written that he [Jiiji] was violent, but at the beginning, he was really caring and thinking about the person when he hit those people. […]. Even before this case had happened, a couple of times, Jiiji really cared about some members and would do it, but it depends on the member: how they perceive it will determine if it's violence. If [the member who was hit] would stay here, he would think that it is a*

totally natural thing to happen, but because he couldn't really stay here, he left. That's
why he kind of says that it was violence. These days Jiiji is almost not doing it anymore,
the generation has changed, and the era has changed.

February 20th, 2018

Some of the assaulted former members sued Jiiji. They blamed him not only for harassing them but also for rape against other members. At the time of my departure from the community, the case was still unclosed.

When I asked Jiiji and other members about this case, the members told me that it was like punishing a little child when he was not behaving well. The punishment, the members explained, was executed out of love and in order to educate the 'deviating' members. It was crucial because sex is *so* important and an important matter in improving human society. They all agreed that the punishments that were performed in the *sei-misogi* were necessary. When I asked Jiiji about that case, he said that he would do anything in order to stop polluted sex. He said that the reason the world is distorted and operating in the worst manners that hurt not only humans but also nature is rooted in the fact that humans are involved in sexual activities that bring more immature souls to the earth, and when these immature souls are forming the human society, one cannot expect for any spiritual improvement. In order to make a better world, he said, it was crucial to improve humans' attitude towards intercourse and understand their divine mission while doing so, which will ultimately bring more souls with higher spirituality to the earth.

Regarding the accusation of rape, when I asked Jiiji about this case, which I came to know about after searching materials about KH in Japanese online, Jiiji explained the situation and why he considered it as an educational act:

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

such a state. But she understands that I have other partners that have reached such a level that can create such a partnership. […] The right order is created by the spiritual level of the female members. […]. That's why, if the spiritual level of the female is low, the male would also express a low level. So in this sense, living together in a community will become very dangerous because it might create a disordered place. A community might collapse due to money and sex – that's what occurred in the past in many communities. So people with disordered minds, […] they have a spiritual level of sex as low as the general people.[…]. […] So to [two female members' names], I demonstrated to them what was polluted sex and what is precious sex. […]. […] I just demonstrated for people that have a lower sexual level. […] That's why, for people that don't understand the sacredness of sex, when I demonstrated such sacred sex and polluted sex to the members, they thought that it was rape. So that's why they said 'it's like rape' because it wasn't raping because there weren't any victims in this situation.[…][14]*

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Sexual relations should only be made, then, when receiving a divine certification, or as KH members describe it, as a ceremonial act and not merely to seek pleasure.

Yet, although many efforts are made in order to educate members about the *truth* behind KH, even when members learn about these theories and know their chants by heart, they will not be evaluated highly unless they will also perform high spirituality by improving the quality of their work and production. Yumi, Jiiji's secretary, explained to me how members' spirituality is assessed:

[…] we can sense it. That's why Jiiji says he always gives marks to the members, because he can sense without any tools, [but] with intuition, with vibrancy. He can sense, I can sense, maybe you can sense that too. 'That person is this level or that level' – we can tell. I can sense from their atmosphere, vibrancy, and from their words and actions. And the consistency between their words and actions. We can sense it.

February 12th, 2018

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[14] When asking Jiiji if he would not mind that I will publish this topic in an academic paper, he replied: *"You have the freedom to do whatever you want, that's how much we are open. Originally the story about sex – I'm not manipulating information here. You understand that. We are determined to be open publicly because we recognize its importance."* (February 20, 2018).

One of the examples I witnessed of the spirituality assessment based on the members' work was when Chiyo, one of the office workers, was scolded by Jiiji. This was at a community meeting, and one of the members who are closest to Jiiji was reading what he wrote in KH blog. Jiiji said that this member did a great job in perceiving exactly what Jiiji was feeling. Jiiji said that he wished he could trust Chiyo as much as he trusts this member, but he could not. He did not add anything to it. Chiyo, who was interpreting the meeting to me, told me that she made a mistake labeling the water KH received for their annual Matsuri. The meeting went on, and Yumi, Jiiji's secretary, was leaving the meeting. Before she left, she told Chiyo that although one of the guests wanted to share something he felt with the members, she, Yumi, had to leave, so maybe he could share it tomorrow.

When it was time for this guest to speak, Jiiji asked him to do so. Chiyo said that Yumi asked her if it could be delayed for tomorrow. Then Jiiji told Chiyo that it might be that Yumi said one thing but mean another thing and that she, Chiyo, could not understand Yumi's feelings. At that point, all eyes were on Chiyo. She looked embarrassed and apologized. Jiiji continued: *"This person is something!"* (*ano hito – sugoi*), and he told the community the whole story of Chiyo's mistake, while some of them made surprising comments (*"did she?!"*, *"really?"*). He said that since she has a low spiritual level, she always makes the same mistakes again and again and never learn from them. An interesting thing to note is that the whole time Jiiji was criticizing Chiyo, she was interpreting to me what he said about her. In Jiiji's last sentences, Chiyo was already too overwhelmed and told me, *"Sorry, I cannot translate, I cannot concentrate. I'm confused"*. This seemed to only make her feel more guilty as she was not even performing her translation job well.

Although education about the KH system of beliefs is important in the community, and members are expected to know them, members are still measured by their practices more than their understanding of the theories behind it. Yet in order to connect between the reason, many of them joined the community and their current practices, or in other words, the environmental concern and the constant strive for spiritual improvement, educational sessions are held. These sessions combine the significance of the environment with the importance of spirituality and emphasize the connectivity between the two. The same is done not only for members but also for guests who visit the community to learn some of its practices in order to gain a better understanding of environmental practices such as organic agriculture, self-sustainability, community living, and microorganism usage.

7.3. Spreading seeds of thoughts

KH offers various kinds of experiences to guests, such as visiting the community as regular guests (from one day to one month), long term guests (more than a month), volunteering (in agriculture, kitchen, and community work), and group hosting. In 2012 KH started offering Gaia Education's Ecovillage Design Education programme (EDE) to learn how to operate as a self-sustained community both environmentally and socially. The community held the EDE for three years, and some participants later became community members. After holding the EDE three times, KH developed its own educational program that is called The Truth School and has been running since 2015. The program offers various classes in many domains: farming practices, sustainable cooking, learning about microorganisms, and spiritual learning such as "learning the personality", Katakamuna theory and "sex and the universe" classes. In this program, participants hear lectures by Jiiji, participate in the community's activities and meetings, and hold a graduation party in the end. They also write a personal diary to express everything they feel and think, and after Jiiji is reading it, they have meetings with him. The Truth School's fee is paid in accordance to the participant's income: high income (more than 4 million JPY per year): would pay 220,000JPY, medium-income (more than 2 million and less than 4 million JPY per year): 200,000JPY, and low income (less than 2 million JPY per year): 180,000JPY. The fee covers accommodation and food. Simultaneous translation is provided in English and Chinese. KH prefers having a workshop of its own instead of the EDE. When I asked why Chiyo explained:

> *We had three EDEs in KH. Every time we planned the program, we had to balance Gaia Education Program [with our beliefs]. [...] We had to balance the program for social-dimension, economic-dimension, spiritual-dimension, ecological-dimension, and we had to put in eco-buildings, water treatment – and that is also important, but in our understanding, if your spirituality is established, naturally the necessary things will come. That's how we see the world. So we don't really have to be forced to do something. The important thing is spirituality, spiritual development, and to be together with the universe[...]. [...] But although I said that to other organizers [from Gaia], and to Ecovillage Design Education [...], they couldn't understand at all. [...] running EDE for three years, we felt it was a struggle because we couldn't really design the program, [...] and wanted to increase the spiritual part. [I was thinking to myself] "why don't we just stop having EDE, and we can just start having our own program?" I suggested. And also, the criticism [big criticism against KH that was published at that time on the*

internet] was about the same time. It was good timing to step out of Gaia education and GEN. Some outside people might believe that the criticism was the reason we stopped offering EDE – but this is not true. Even before Gaia stopped the EDE, we had the decision to change the educational program to be more spirituality-focused. That was the Truth School.

<div align="right">

January 8th, 2018

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The criticism Chiyo was mentioning was an outcome of a few lawsuits against the community by former members. Among other complaints, the former members were blaming Jiiji for physical abuse and his wife for mental abuse (as mentioned earlier in this chapter). One of the clauses mentioned that working seven days a week made the members mentally weak, and they could not think clearly. After that criticism, Gaia Education stopped having the EDE in KH since they claimed that in a place where there is violence, it is not safe to hold this educational program. After the criticism was published and Gaia Trust pulled out of its agreement with KH, the community stopped calling themselves an Ecovillage - as Gaia Trust is affiliated with the GEN - and changed their name to *a village of bodhisattvas*. The explanation Chiyo provided for the new name was that *"Bodhisattvas are not in the nirvana stage yet. They are in this world and try to make other people enlightened in order to release them from a life of suffering. This is why this is a proper name for KH"*.

Jiiji was also telling me about their withdrawal from Gaia Trust's EDE:

In short, former members couldn't handle their ego, so in order to criticize KH, former members got together and told it to the ecovillage network that was important for our social status. Such people [ecovillage people] are jealous because KH got popular at that time, so they gave us such a punishment. That's why this kind of criticism started to spread. But if KH is such a bad place like they said, you were here for three months [me, the author], so you would sense such a thing, right? Such an atmosphere. Moreover, the children are so sensitive, so they wouldn't grow up in such a healthy state if this website was true.

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February 20th, 2018

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Although KH had attempted to spread its values via workshops regulated by external entities before it was criticized for violence, even before the EDE was operated in KH, they were holding the Natural Therapy Program for *care guests*. These guests are staying in KH in order to overcome their mental illnesses and bad habits, such as smoking, drinking, drug abuse

and addictions. In this program, they are educated to recognize what is the deviation in their spirit by writing a journal which Jiiji is reading and having weekly meetings with him for consultations. They are also taught how to *get over the ego*, live according to the *divine will*, and *forget about the self* as the first steps of recognizing a holistic worldview in which the ego does not attack the self. Unusually this program lasts for three months, but it could be longer or shorter, depending on the progress of the care guest. The community is proud of having a program that enables guests to heal from their mental illnesses and difficulties without using drugs. When Jiiji decides the care guests had learned enough, they graduate from the program and have a graduation ceremony with KH members. In the ceremony, Jiiji is talking about the progress of the care guest, the care guests talk about their journey the way they see it, and sometimes relatives of the care guest or community members also give a short speech. Many KH members were previously care guests that had graduated from the Natural Therapy Program and later decided to join the community. Although not all care guests graduate, and many of them leave before they are told they graduated, during my stay in KH, quite often, care guests stayed at the community, so it seems that the program is fairly popular. There were also three or more long-term guests who graduated from the Natural Therapy Program and decided to stay in KH for longer as non-members and to live and sometimes volunteer as paid guests.

When staying at the community for long or short term, guests are also invited to listen to a presentation about the community's beliefs held in community meetings and presented mainly by Jiiji. Hence, although guests usually do not come to the community for spiritual reasons, they are encouraged to learn more and focus on spirituality when in the community. Furthermore, members often talk about the importance of spiritual development during work, meals, and other casual conversations. Although spiritual education is not of top priority for guests when visiting KH, it becomes one of the most prevalent topics when staying in the community.

7.4. Summary

KH views the official education system in Japan as insufficient for teaching people what is important and for creating the society they believe should exist. Therefore, they do not urge the community children to go to school more than the mandatory school years. When pointing some children as "working too hard on their grades but not enough on their spirituality", KH is openly stating that doing well in school is a value that they appreciate in a very different way than the Japanese society they operate in. In order to improve the

community's children education in the realms KH perceive as important, various presentations about KH beliefs are held, and adult members set daily reminders to the community children regarding the significance of spirituality.

When it comes to adult members, although educational workshops and presentations are held too, the expectations are set on the behavior of the members, more than their understanding of the system of beliefs of the community. When members do not act in a way that presents high spirituality, they are expected to work hard on increasing their spirituality based on what they have learned and on the theories the community believes in. However, most of the members are said to have a not-sufficient spiritual level. Hence, they are often scolded by Jiiji. When I asked them if they understood in detail theories like the Katakamuna to see if they knew what they aspire for, most of the members did not know exactly how to explain it and even admitted they did not completely understand, although they understood that it was important. In that case, it is suggested that members are said to not improve their spirituality since they have a very superficial understanding of what kind of improvement should be made, how to act in order to achieve it, and what is their ultimate goal when doing so, as an individual and as a community. Members seem to know what the ultimate society should look like in terms of human relations and their treatment of nature, yet the process in which, according to KH, will get them there is not clear to most members. In order to teach them better, Jiiji is holding educational series, such as *sei misogi*, so members can learn by experience, yet these series are not held regularly (according to the community).

The community also attempts to educate non-members by inviting those to participate in KH workshops, lectures, and experiences such as volunteering, visiting the community, and participating in its programs. These activities and visits are branded as environmental/nature-friendly and attract mostly people who wish to live a more sustainable lifestyle, create a community themselves, live self-sufficiently, learn new agricultural methods, and learn how to reduce their ecological footprint. Although spirituality is mentioned as included in the program, it is often embedded in environmental education, yet the hierarchy of importance between environmentalism and spirituality is not mentioned. It will be revealed to the participants only after coming to KH and participating in its educational programs, lectures, or during the stay. When portraying spirituality as an essential element in the environmental improvement of the earth and an essential element for a better just society in the future, guests visiting KH are exposed to their system of beliefs and choose whether to accept spirituality as the most important thing and in doing so, to accept that KH is the best place to reach spiritual development in, or not.

8. Bounded scenery

Living in a community necessarily means sharing is a fundamental part of life. Besides sharing the same space, duties, and responsibilities, members are also said to share the same values and beliefs. In KH, sharing goes a long way farther than that, to share all of the individual's belongings, assets, as well as thoughts and feelings. Yet, the responsibility for spiritual improvement is always of the individual member, and the importance of each member's spiritual improvement reflects on the entire community. Although the community is said to be operating as a collective when one of the members is deviating from the way they are expected to behave, the community disclaims them, and there have been a few occasions in which members were expelled from the community. In both cases of banishing members, which were brought to my attention, the members eventually came back. One of these cases was of Misaki, a 40-year-old single mother. I was interviewing her and asked if she had any hard times since she joined the community. Her reply was: "*yes, many! Like the time Chiyo kicked me out.*" Misaki did not seem thrilled to explain about the occasion and hence asked me to ask Chiyo to explain to me. That was the explanation I have received from Chiyo:

Yeah, I just played the role to kick her out, but I was kind of representing other people's thoughts, so I was not only the one, but actually, this was for a good reason. I didn't mean to kick her out…[…] But she was very disharmonious, yeah, and then, we kind of told her many many many times, and she didn't really understand that she was stagnated, and she… I don't know, I can't remember exactly […].

We thought – she doesn't have anywhere to go, right? Because she doesn't have a home. And if she realizes this is the only place she can stay, then she can see inside of herself. So this is an opportunity, but she wasn't really looking into herself. She was like hum… making excuses or something like that. And she kind of insisted on her own ego, so we kind of created the situation to push her to look into herself. If we kind of expel her, then she really has to look into herself because she doesn't have anywhere else to go - she has to be here, right? So we just created the situation for her to think about. So it's kind of a harsh way, and in a third person's point of view, like my aunt [who heard about what Chiyo did], that was like – "oh! I can't believe my sweet Chiyo is doing such a thing", and she doesn't understand why I am doing so. I was playing the mean person but not from my real spirit.

January 17th, 2018

After hearing the story from Chiyo, I asked Misaki what she felt at that time. Her reply was:

Members often told me: "your energy is so disharmonious, so please just get out of this place. I don't want to work with you". It happened a lot. Even when I joined the harvest team, the reason for that was because... so I was working at the central team at that time [house work, cleaning, laundry etc.] and Jiiji told me in a very harsh way: "If you are like that – it's disharmonious!" But I didn't listen. Then he told me: "Don't be around me – go away!" So I went to Nakagami warehouse and told them: "please let me work on something here." And also when I wanted to talk to Jiiji when he was in Nakagami warehouse, he told me: "Don't come around me!", but I had to do something, and also Jiiji advised me - Just don't talk! Work! So I asked the harvest team to work with them

January 17th, 2018

The story of Misaki's banishment ended when she came back to the community and asked them to join again after a few hours she was wandering alone in the village in Fujinomiya. She promised them that she would change and after her second time to request it, they accepted her back. This story tells the division between the community and one of its members whenever they do not follow the community guidelines according to their perception. Although neither Chiyo nor Misaki mentioned clearly who was the person who suggested expelling Misaki, from Misaki's narrative, it seems like it came after Jiiji was scolding her for her disharmonious behavior, or at least, that is what has left the biggest impression on her.

Then, although the community is said to be one big family beyond blood relations, there are gaps between the holistic worldview they claim to hold and the practice of it. Banishing a member from the community is only one example. However, when giving the community's beliefs a closer look, the boundaries they draw against their holistic worldview are visible in other domains as well.

8.1. Holism manifested in separation

Boundaries help members realize their place in the community, what they can and cannot do, and what they should aspire for in the future. In point of fact, these boundaries are also embedded in the community's beliefs. One of the most present beliefs in the community, the Katakamuna, puts the separation between the world of *kamu* (the potential world) and the world of *kata* (the phenomena world) in the center, yet the utopian goal of following the

Katakamuna, is to achieve full harmony between the two worlds, as believed the ancient Katakamuna civilization had. According to Jiiji, the Katakamuna people could sense a phenomenon prior to its existence in the phenomena world, when it was still a potential in the world of *kamu*. Then, in order to achieve this full harmony again, there is an essential need to follow the one person that can bridge between the two worlds, as he can communicate with the world of *kamu* and prepare the community before a given phenomenon comes into existence. Jiiji is already doing so when he is preaching about the predicted deterioration of the earth if humanity will not change its ways, and delivers messages from divine entities so that humans living in the phenomena world will change their deeds to summon the *necessary phenomena* from the potential world.

For members who wish to improve the condition of the environment, realizing what phenomena is about to come and what is necessary for humans to do to prevent further environmental deterioration is utterly significant. Therefore, taking part in a community that has a member who can communicate with the divine and striving to improve one's spirituality so they can also sense a phenomenon prior to its appearance is crucial. Then, not only the boundaries between the phenomena world and the potential world are decreasing, but also those between what is considered as nature and humans. After all, one of the most prominent claims of KH is that humans are a part of nature, yet the community, despite its holistic claims, also claims that the modern man is no longer a part of nature if one sees themselves as separated. More than a few times, I have heard that "*humans turned their back on nature*", "*since the industrial revolution, man and nature are no longer integrated*", and "*we should go back to our natural origins*". This suggests that although KH is supporting the idea that when discussing nature, humans are included in this definition, they are also a part of the school of thought that separates the two entities. This contradiction was also seen in KH presentation called Sex and The Universe:

> *[…] Without high spirituality, it is very dangerous to practice the mystery of sex. Therefore, the era has sealed it. As long as we look at human history, we can see there is a part where humans are a very stupid existence. On the other hand, there is no mistake that **humans are given a role as an advanced existence which is different from other animals** by the divine. We have entered the 21st century, and we need to live with a new consciousness as life living in the universe. Existences in charge of the divine calendar under the universal law have created the flow of eras. And, the time has arrived when we will understand that they have brought down souls appropriate to express the era properly.*

Stupid eras were set like that, and souls appropriate to them have expressed the eras. The past has been like that so far. If so, the time has arrived when each one of us should seriously think about why we were born and live on Earth, what era we will express from now on, and what is given to us.

According to this text, it seems that for KH, human are indeed a part of nature, but also a supreme species compared to others. Yet as seen in the case when Misaki was banished from the community, contradictions between a holistic world of view and a fragmented one are also seen in the community itself, or what they consider as a "family beyond blood relations". Indeed, one can see the action of banishing a member as an educational act that its sole aim is to make them improve their spirituality, and not as an alienation to one of the family members. But the case of Misaki is only a sheer reminder of the role of the individual in KH: to improve one's own spirituality. Although cooperative work is prioritized and mutual life is at the base of the community, the way to improve the state of KH, the society, the environment, and the earth as a whole, lays on the shoulders of the individual. The role of the community is to provide that individual guidance and support during this process which, according to KH, can be done nowhere else but there. With this strong self-rightfulness and self-importance, the community differentiates itself from its surroundings and creates a clear separation from the external society.

8.2. The community and the society

On the tour Chiyo was taking us, the guests, on one of the first days of my stay at KH, she was pointing at a large compound with many buildings and said that they are the property of Nichiren. She also mentioned that *"Nichiren were also coming to KH, as they wished to do some missionary work, and since we are always open to new ideas, we had no problem listening to them. Then, they started asking for money, and so we refused. Since then they haven't come again. Our leader [Jiiji] always told us "never take money when speaking about spiritual matters'."* Mentioning Nichiren, I asked Chiyo why did they choose to locate so close to another group's buildings, and she replied:

Nichiren and KH are completely different. They are a religion, and although this is also a kind of spirituality, we are very far from religion. We came to Mount Fuji for energetic reasons. There are four tectonic plates in this area, and therefore Mount Fuji,

which is a volcano, was created. In an active volcano, the energy is always changing, so there's a constant change in the energy. That's why it's a high energy field.

Some religions also came to Mount Fuji for its energy, so besides Nichiren, there is also a group dedicated to Shōtoku Taishi (Prince Shōtoku), and a 15-minute drive from here there was the headquarter of Aum Shinrikyō.

When we first got here, neighbors thought we were a part of Aum [Shinrikyō], and they were suspicious. Still, until now, some of the children's parents won't let their kids play with the community kids. But once they know us, they understand that we are not the same, and so we can make good relations with some of the neighbors.

<div align="right">October 23rd, 2017</div>

The fact that the neighbors were suspicious of KH was also mentioned in Ayumi's interview when she told me that she and her husband were attempting to live sustainable life nearby:

We had no idea [about KH], but we were looking for a house. We went to the city hall and the agricultural union. I asked many people, but nobody had the information I needed. Then someone told me: "you should ask Konohana Nōen [the previous name of KH]". Then, they introduced us [Ayumi and her husband] to Konohana farm. We wanted information about raising chicken […]. We were told that "there are people that moved somewhere around here two years ago, why won't you ask them for information?". That was the beginning of our encounter with KH. In fact, they said that they are like a field, farms and a house, so it is similar to our idea, so we decided to move near KH, around here.

[…] We got to know KH. They showed us where we could get our house and farm. They [KH] landed us agriculture machines. We had a good interaction, so they took care of us well. But at the beginning, how can I say, at that time there was Aum Shinrikyō and their incident, and their headquarter was nearby. Then, we just came here, so we were wondering, "isn't it also Aum?". People were talking about KH, that they are all cult members. In such a situation, although they took care of us, we were wondering about the truth of KH, living like that so many people... so we doubted a little. However, yes, yes…. we were organizing workshops in collaboration with KH and made learning

opportunities with KH about environmental things, like liquid detergent, fermented food and these kinds of things. We offered these kinds of workshops.

At that time – I don't remember the details – but when I talked with Jiiji, sometimes the flow of the conversation didn't go well, and then… What was he telling me?.... Let me try to remember… What did he say? I cannot remember the exact words, but – we had a prejudice about KH, so Jiiji said, "let's stop our relationship" because we doubted him. Until now, we have been working together, but there were misunderstandings, so he said, "Let's stop!". Then soon, my husband and I went to the field to talk to him directly. Then what Jiiji said was: "You guys and I are no different. We are the same". That's what he said. And also, "we both eat food, we are both living on the same earth, we breathe the same air, [Ayumi was crying a little at this point], so we are made of the same material, don't you think we are the same?". He said those things.

Until then, I didn't think like that. I realized I was wrong. Since then, our relationship has gotten much closer because I saw things without prejudice. I knew I was wrong. Since then, I came to KH, and we were invited to the adults' meetings and birthday parties. We used to come usually in the evening after work. The meetings were even longer than now, although there were only about 20 people there. […] Every night Jiiji would tell stories about the divine. He would speak until 2 in the morning, and our relationship got much closer. That's how it happened, and quite quickly, we got involved with KH.

[…]

Thinking about how we became members… it naturally happened. As I said before, we wanted to practice living with nature and without being a burden on the environment but, how can I say... the more important thing is to purify our hearts. Jiiji said, "this is the most important thing!". Then I thought, "I understand!". In order to do this, I thought that the best thing would be to live together with KH. I thought like that. Then I became a member.

February 22nd, 2018

When the community was first established, internal factors like being a community, living in one house, having community meetings and a shared economic system made segregation between KH and all other neighbors in Fujinomiya. Yet external factors, like

choosing to live in an area where many religious groups founded their headquarter, and the Aum Shinrikyō terror attack, made neighbors suspicious about the community. However, the fact that there was no harmful behavior of KH towards their neighbors (that I have heard of), and that KH had gestures of goodwill towards neighbors, like borrowing agricultural equipment to Ayumi and her husband, and on another occasion, gave some of their crops for free to some of the neighbors, settled the suspiciousness level of many of their neighbors towards them.

Still, the separation between members and all those who are not a part of the community remains. Jiiji needed to confirm that members would be loyal to the community, and in order to do so, they needed to abandon all other commitments they had. To do this, it is not enough sharing personal belongings, and money and assets with KH, but also being mentally "free from all previous attachments", as I heard some of the community members quoting a few times. Hence, in some cases, members renounce their biological family to declare their full commitment to the community.

8.3. Blood relations dissolved

When I asked Yumi, Jiiji's secretary and the closest member to him, who is said to understand him the most, if she has a close relationship with her family, she replied: "*they are so far, I mean spiritually, because their values are so different from mine. So we don't have a close connection anymore, but they kind of understand my will and my path. This is good enough for me*". A few days later, when the same topic was brought up again in one of my meetings with Jiiji, Yumi's relationship with her biological family was presented a little differently:

Jiiji: *"Look at Yumi and Mariko. They are so stupid! Because they live in such a spirit [KH spirit]. So Yumi cut her relationship with her own family because they don't know what kind of life she lives here. And she doesn't care about her biological family, and she just looks at the spiritual level."*

Yumi: *"Because I have a divine spirit that resonates with me."*

Jiiji: *"[…] humans living on earth have many stories. Miserable stories. […] in the current era, unless people would have such a point of view, we cannot find the truth in this chaotic, polluted, and self-centered society. […] After all, we should think about who we are and what life is. We should talk to ourselves and be aware of the nature and the truth of this world. We should wake up! […] awakening here means you were asleep, and you didn't see the truth because your eyes were closed, and then when you wake up, you realize that this is the truth.*

[…] When we open our eyes and are able to see it, we can share it with everyone since everything and everyone are one in this world. When we're not awake, we are trapped in our ego and have a subjective viewpoint. That's why there are many subjective viewpoints, as the same number as humans. But when we wake up, there's just one truth. When we are separated from the divine and then return to it, we just go back and forth."

February 20th, 2018

The differences between Yumi's version of her relationship with her family and Jiiji's straightforwardness is suggested to be due to the common social acceptance of stories of a family member alienating to their biological family. It is also suggested in the way that Jiiji presented this fact when calling Yumi and Mariko "stupid" as if he depicts the general society's idea of such cases. Then, when mentioning that Yumi is doing so for her spirituality, he is inexplicably saying that she was doing something great for a sublime goal. It shows her totality and full loyalty to KH, and therefore, it is only natural that such a loyal person would be the person who is the closest to Jiiji.

One more member that is close to Jiiji since the first years of the community is Emi. She was a member for twenty years when we talked and is one of the most appreciated members of the community. She heard about the community from a friend and came to visit. At that time, she was married and a mother to a three-year-old boy. When I asked her about her first encounter with the community, this was her description:

I came here along with my husband and child to hang out. Then I met Jiiji, and I heard his story about the real meaning of people's happiness, and about being happy from other people's happiness, that this is real happiness. When I heard that I was a little shocked. Until that time, I thought that happiness was equal to my happiness, so I was surprised: "there is such a way of thinking!". At that time, I couldn't even think about that. Because the idea of having other's happiness as your happiness was totally new to me, so I wanted to experience human happiness. When I heard Jiiji's words, I thought, "this person is really talking words of truth". I felt it deep inside of me. I felt that this person was a very important person to me. Since I was twenty years old, I thought that I wanted to know the truth. […] within me, I didn't know who would be the one that would tell me the truth, but I always thought that I wanted to know what is the truth. […] I wanted a person who is like a divine being to tell me what is the truth. I felt that I was always saying the wrong things and hurting other people. Although I didn't have

such an intention, without noticing, I might have hurt some people. That's what I thought. Maybe that's why I wanted a person to tell me the places I am doing wrong.

Emi was often coming to the community to work with Jiiji and to listen to him, as she thought it was a good place for her spiritual development. She was living with her husband and his parents and had a convenient happy life as a housewife. However, she always felt that something was missing and kept on coming back to KH to try and figure out what it was. When her husband saw that she was not the same since she started visiting KH frequently, he tried to intervene:

On that day, when we were eating dinner, I was eating with my husband and child. My husband understood me well. Then he said, "I don't want you to go again to KH". He wasn't the kind of a person that would restrict my actions. At that time, I thought, "I cannot do that. I don't need anything, but the only thing I cannot give up is going to KH". It was really sudden when I said: "I cannot". That's why we said, "let's separate". He has observed me since I encountered KH, and he saw that my spirit was not really present at home – it was in KH. And also, I sensed I had to leave my child because of a conversation with Jiiji at the field. I generally thought that I would move to KH, but in 5-10 years, not now. But then, when my husband told me not to go to Konohana, then the time had come. I felt that this place was so important to me, more than anything else, so I told him, "I am leaving now". He replied, "you can take the car - I will give it to you". And I organized my luggage and came here. It was really sudden.

At that time, there was no discussion. It happened so suddenly. Then I came here and slept here one night, and got up early the next morning and thought, "if I go back now, I can still do this. I can still make it on time". That's what I thought, but I didn't go back. Maybe I thought about it for a few days… but three days later, I went back to the house to take more of my stuff. Then I took all of my important things and came back here. That was like a heart attack.

February 14th, 2018

Separation from the biological family is not an obligation when joining KH. Many of the members still keep in contact with their biological family, go to visit them, take care of their elder parents when they are sick, and some family members even visit the community where their child, sibling or even spouse are members. The case of Yumi and Emi is unique;

however, it exists. While Yumi is said to end her relations with her biological family so she will be able to focus on her spirituality, Emi's case is different. Emi described it in the interview I held with her:

I wanted to bring my husband and child here, but their values were different from mine. For me, the child was also important, but in the general sense, I "lost my head", that's what would be said about me. I realized that completely. I was totally aware of the fact that people could not understand me, so I could not bring my child together with me, for example, my husband's parents. [...] they lived next to us. So if I'd tell them that I bring my child with me, they would get very shocked. So if I were on the opposite side, I would think, "oh, I cannot believe she is taking the child to such a place". So I didn't bring him with me. [...] I wanted to bring him. I think that this way of life and the food quality is so high. But I totally understood that they couldn't understand my way of thinking. One more thing is that... I went on this path, but there is no special connection for the child to come here.

[at this point, I asked for a clarification]

There's no special connection for my son to be here with me. [...]. This is not the path for this child. This child should grow there. That's why...

[I asked again, "how did you know that?"]

Hum... when I haven't really decided to come here yet, I was told by Jiiji, "you have a connection to this place". And when he said that, suddenly I started to cry. I understood I had to be separated from my child. Jiiji said, "you know that, right?"

[I again asked her, "what do you know?"]

That there is no connection with my child, so we have to separate. It is really hard for me to explain.

<div align="right">February 14th, 2018</div>

Emi was telling me that she was thinking of leaving a few times back to her house after she moved to KH, but it never happened. Except for divorce paperwork, she has never seen her husband again (nor her child). The only time she contacted her husband again was when she asked him to take down a blog post in which he wrote that "KH brainwashed my wife and took her away from me". After she wrote to him that this was done out of her free will and asked him to take this blog post down, he did.

Today Emi is completely dedicated to her work in agriculture and other community responsibilities. She claims she is no longer thinking about her previous life and that she feels

like she is completely a part of the community. She believes she will live in KH for the rest of her life. This notion is also written in "Konohana Family Member Applicant Interview Sheet" (see appendix 2), and present in one of the questions all new members need to answer: "4. To become a member means being a member for a lifetime. Do you have such consciousness?". Then, although under Japanese law, the members of KH can freely move out of the community if they wish to do so, they need to accept that their membership will be for a lifetime when they join the community. Yet, they are not obliged to do so immediately. The new membership system of KH declares that all members need to go through a "trial period" of one year before they become members of the community. During this time, they need to finance themselves and are not obliged to share all of their belongings and assets with KH. This time is a critical time not only for the member but also for the community: the potential member can observe KH daily and decide whether or not they are willing to commit to KH for a lifetime, and the community can observe the potential member and convince them why the community is the only place they should dedicate themselves to for the rest of their lives. This time is critical to convince potential members that KH is a ray of light in Japanese society and the only place that is fully committed to achieving spiritual goals that will help to make the earth a better place to live in.

Yet despite the singularity of KH, the community is composed of Japanese who all have experience of living in the Japanese society and share the same culture, history, and biological traits. They do not reject Japanese culture but utilize it to enhance their uniqueness. The special relation they claim that Japanese people always had with nature, embodied in the Shinto religion, Buddhism and folk beliefs, are used by KH to achieve an affinity of potential members. The way that it is done by KH is by providing explanations based on familiar terms. Therefore, the Japanese-ness of KH is an important attribute to be mentioned.

8.4. Nationalism

KH is a distinguished community that makes it very clear who are its members and who are not. Being a member of KH means being a part of a bigger society as the Japanese nation or the East Asian civilization, a concept that gives KH members a sense of mission and obligation to do what they practice for the sake of humanity. The foundations of the community are based on Japanese beliefs, and by being a part of the Japanese society, the members feel they have a fundamental obligation, as they are the chosen nation in terms of spirituality. The uniqueness of the community, however, is not only determined by its Japanese elements but also by beliefs and practices that originated in other countries of East Asia. All those beliefs

eventually express the justification of KH to perceive itself as a leading community with elevated spiritual perception, understanding and abilities, that should teach the rest of humanity the principles to which all should live according to.

The first prominent influence that could be well observed in KH is the Shinto religion, the indigenous religion of Japan. The community started when Jiiji was telling stories of kami to the soon-to-become-members and was ratified when he received the message from Amaterasu Ōmikami (as written in chapter 5). The community was named after the Shinto goddess of Mount Fuji, while even the mountain itself has very high importance in the Shinto religion and is sometimes said to be a kami. These Shinto elements emphasize the importance of the Shinto religion in the community's doctrines. When the community was just founded, the phrase the community members used to say before eating was *"kami sama, itadakimasu"*. One of the founding members told me during an interview:

> *At the beginning we said "kami sama, itadakimasu". But then when people came from outside they wouldn't understand it, so we changed to "itadakimas shimasu – itadakimasu".*

<div align="right">January 22nd, 2018</div>

Besides praying to the kami before the meal, which is not necessarily related to the Shinto religion, some practices' terms are retrieved from Shinto, like *misogi*, the purification ceremony. Although the Shinto *misogi* practice is different from KH's practice, the name of the ceremony and the concept of a purification ceremony points out a direct connection to the traditional Shinto *misogi*. By choosing this name for the ritual, the roots of this idea could be quite identifiable as a Shinto ritual. Some of the community members also identify themselves as Shinto clerics. Yūki, a man in his 40s, is said to be a Shinto priest. As he grew up in Ōmoto-Kyō followers family, he was trained to be a Shinto priest for almost five years since he was in the second grade. He is now KH's Shinto priest and is in charge of events and ceremonies, like a planting-rice ceremony, summoning Shinto gods and goddesses on special occasions and purification rituals, and anything that is asked to be done in a ceremonial way. In addition to Yūki, Yumi is also known in the community for being a Shinto clerk, as she is the community's *miko*. Having both a Shinto priest and a *miko* in the community points to a strong connection of the community to the Shinto religion.

Some of the community's rituals are held on culturally important days in Japan. One of them is the Setsubun, the traditional first day of spring, which is celebrated on February 3rd. During the Setsubun, unlike the common Japanese phrase, *Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!*

("Demons out! Luck in!"), in KH, they say *Fuku wa uchi! Oni mo uchi!* Which literally means that they call both good spirits and bad spirits (demons). KH members explain that demons are evil because humans have bad hearts. The demons look straight into humans' hearts, and by doing so, humans can reflect on themselves and improve their spirituality. That is why demons are welcome to KH during the Setsubun, so they will encourage members to improve their spirituality. One more tradition that KH practices is having a bonfire at the beginning of the year (usually practiced on the Japanese New Year's Eve), and it is also at the bonfire that Yūki is dressed in his Shinto priest clothing and says Norito[15].

Jiiji was continuously explaining at the community meetings that the ancestors of the Japanese society were living with nature and by nature. Otherwise, they could never sense the existence of all the kamis and their own divinity. Some of his explanations were: *"In a Shinto shrine, there is always a mirror. That's because the only kami at the Shinto shrine is ourselves, and when we visit the shrine, we can see it. We, the Japanese, are the kamis, and that is why we can connect to the divine."* He also explained about the enlightenment in the Japanese language: *"although the term enlightenment originally came from India, only the Japanese fully comprehended it, and you can see it in the Japanese word 'satori'. Sa is a gap, and tori means 'to take away'. Then, that means that when you take away the gap between the divine and you – you are enlightened. You are the divine, and the divine is you because you took away the gap".* Then, having the Shinto religion as their strength that allows KH and the Japanese in general to understand best the source of life and the divinity as a whole, the Japanese are perceived to have an advantage over all other nations. Furthermore, an example of a practice of KH that derives from the presumably distinguished Japanese physiology is the community's vegetarian diet, which partially stems from the Japanese folk belief that their intestines are longer than those of other nations (as explained in chapter 5).

The importance of the Japanese people in the spiritual enlightenment of the world could be well observed in KH: the spiritual level that KH members aspire to be equivalent to is the Katakamuna people's level, which is said to be the ancient Japanese. KH members often refer to the Katakamuna people as their ancestors, and the 48 sounds that are said to make a different atmosphere by the Katakamuna theory are actually the 48 letters of the Japanese letters, the Katakana, when some of the chants have a meaning in the Japanese language. Therefore, being the descendants of the Katakamuna people is, in a way, increasing KH members' sense of responsibility towards spreading their ideas to the world and making it a

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[15] Liturgical texts or ritual incantations in Shintoism.

better place to live in. In one of their song called The Age of Miroku' (see appendix 3 for the full song), they sing:

In order to make this planet a heaven
First, as a model
It is said there is a country to become heaven
That is the country called "Yamato" [Japan]

But not only their songs suggest that Japan has an important role in being a model for the new social order to come. When one of the typhoons hit Japan at the end of 2017, the members mentioned at the community meetings that Japan is a pure country with pure nature since there are many typhoons that clean it every year. They also mentioned that once Japan changes, the whole world will do so too. In addition to the belief that Japan has an elevated status among the nations, while Japan itself is a country that was influenced by the ancient East Asian civilization, some of the most well-known Japanese characteristics, like Buddhism and the belief in karma and yin and yang, that was introduced to Japan more than one thousand years ago but originated in China and India, it is also important to look into the East Asian influences over KH as well.

The notion that Buddha has revealed himself to Jiiji is considered to be a turning point in Jiiji's life, and this encounter started a sequence that eventually led to KH's establishment. Buddhism, then, is integrated with the community's history. The community also defines itself in a Buddhist term by calling itself "a village of bodhisattvas". Besides Buddhism, other beliefs that originated in India, like the belief in human's karma, and the fact that people's spirits reincarnate, are also present in the daily community's conversations, meetings, and in its more established beliefs. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the members refer to karma as the tendency of the person's personality and their ways of thinking and behaving, and not as a spiritual principle of act and effect as the original Indian term implies, so alternations are also present, as long as it serves the community. Moreover, the person's karma could be measured by analyzing the Chinese characters of the name by the Chinese concepts of yin and yang. Using these terms as measures of the personality and spirituality in KH points out the concept and assimilation of the community in the wider East Asian region.

The notion of East Asian society as a cohesive community that share the same origins, values, and destiny is present in KH's dichotomous view of an Eastern World and a Western World. In their eyes, the Western world is in charge of the massive destruction of the planet,

the industrialization, and individualistic worldview in which the individual is in the center, and that the Eastern world, which is believed to be more holistic, collective, and lives integrated life with nature, must come with a solution to the deterioration that the West has caused. In the comprehensive presentation about the community that each guest is obliged to listen to when visiting the community for the first time, a research that was conducted by a man called Misao Murayama (see appendix 4) was presented. Murayama claimed that there is a cycle of 1,600 years throughout history, when the so-called "East civilization" and the so-called "West civilization" are having a "dark time" or a "bright time": every 800 years, the "East" and the "West" civilizations are transforming from dark-to-bright and vice versa. The two civilizations have dark times and bright times interchangeably. For example, Murayama claims that from 1200 to 2000, the "West civilization" was in its bright times and the "East civilization" was in its dark times. He gave the examples of having many wars in Japan during the middle ages and that The Meiji restoration (1868) and China revolution (1949) was a sign that the age of darkness was about to come to an end for the "East civilization". During this time, the "West civilization" was on the rise, having the renaissance and the industrial revolution. This theory does not specify exactly what nations are "Eastern" and what nations are "Western". Some parts of the world, like the Americas and South African civilizations, are excluded from the theory (except Egypt, which is said to be a part of the "West civilization"). This theory also does not elaborate on what defines "dark times" and "bright times". For example, the industrial revolution is considered a sign of "bright times". Furthermore, it does not go further into social questions, such as: were those "bright times" bright only for the leaders and the noble people or for the general public as well? Lastly, this theory does not cover all historical events but generalizes some events that Maruyama chose for his theory. Hence, it is safe to say that this theory has many limitations, yet KH chose to use it as a supporting theory for the fact that the social and environmental changes that are about to come will originate in the Eastern side of the world.

8.5. Summary

While holism is embedded in KH's beliefs and is said to be an integral part of their way of life, there is also a fundamental concept of separation in their perception of the existence of humans on earth, compared to the divine and to nature, as well as a separation manifested in the role of each member in the community in terms of spiritual development. The community is said to be the ultimate place to be a part of for those who wish to improve the condition of

the earth, the social order and to live a meaningful life while having spiritual guidance and social support. However, the guarantee for the change that is said to be approaching comes from multiple theories and beliefs of the community and is independent of the actions of KH members. Being a part of the community is said to assist the members in improving their spirituality, which will, in turn, make a change in the physical world, yet the perceived coming change is not said to be depending on them. Still, the coming *awakening* is portrayed as a change that will happen when the spiritual level of all humans will be higher than the current state, and KH is said to have an integral role in showing others the *truth.* Therefore, it is assumed that when Jiiji is presenting the coming *qualitative shift*, as he calls it, he is stipulating it in the spiritual level of KH members, and by doing so, urging them to work on their spirituality by *getting over their ego* and *polish their hearts.* That being the case, KH's promise for environmental and social redemption is stipulated by an individual improvement.

When spiritual improvement takes such a key role in the longed-for change, members are convinced that their ultimate contribution to this change can only be made when they would live in settings that will help them improve their spiritual level, listen to the *divine will* and fulfill the role they had been given by the divine. One cannot complete their contribution to the earth without joining the community, as seen in Ayumi's story. When they come to an understanding that KH is the ultimate place for them to be a part of in order to improve the world's condition, they believe that the only option for them is to commit to the community. Jiiji was continuously stating that although there are many initiations to improve the state of the earth, KH is the only place that knows how to do it and tackle the psychological and social problems that lead to deterioration in other realms. When many of those who encountered KH already believed there is a fundamental problem in the way the world systems are operating, the solution offered by the community can seem like an ultimate one: to change the world systems by offering a new prototype of a society that is based on spiritual improvement, community living, and organic agriculture.

KH members join the community out of faith that up until that point, they could not achieve their goals in life, whether these are personal goals, family goals, or social and environmental goals. Their hope that their membership in KH would change lies in their belief that KH is different from what they had experienced before. Believing that KH is right and others are wrong, be it the state, their friends, or their family, makes the separation from their previous life more reasonable in their eyes. Hence, despite the fact that there may be a caring, loving family to a given member, their belief that this same family holds them back from doing what is *right* makes it logical for them to determine their relationships with their loved ones.

They would not risk their spiritual and environmental goals by keeping contact with those who might make them deviate from such objectives. Furthermore, membership in the community is said to be for a lifetime, so they have no worries about what will happen after they achieve their goals, as they see themselves as an integral part of the community.

The connectivity with nature relies deeply on the fact that the members are Japanese. Examples of this notion can be seen in the community's Japanese folk religion, the new interpretations of terms in Buddhism, and the belief that the ancient civilization of Japan lived according to the divine as they were sensing phenomena from the world of *kamu*. Striving to revive the Katakamuna civilization is said to be out of the responsibility of the Japanese towards the world, as only the Japanese can connect to the divine (and by doing so, reach the real enlightenment, or in Japanese, *satori*). Also, this communication can assure that what they do is the best practice, and by that, be the only ones who know undoubtedly what is best for nature, as they are connected to the divinity that creates all things. Overall, it seems that the community sees itself as a part of a nation that the longed-for social, environmental, and spiritual change will rise from.

9. Discussion and Conclusion

While KH is indeed an organic agricultural-based self-sustaining community, which supports itself in terms of food, construction, and labor, it is first and foremost a spiritual community that puts spiritual development above all other values. While they do include environmental beliefs and practices in their doctrines, as well as social values, working day ethics, and nationalistic ideas, these are all secondary in comparison with the spiritual aspect. However, when interacting with the general public through the information on their website, their workshops, the Lotus Land café, and when interacting with community visitors, KH emphasizes the environmental aspect above all others. Although it could be argued that KH's spirituality has environmentalism embedded within it, the fact that they mainly highlight environmental aspects when interacting with non-members can be seen as somewhat incongruent.

When analyzing the community's recruitment mechanism, it is best to first look into members' recruitment process. Using Lofland & Stark's model, the members' narratives and life stories (some were told by other members) point at cognitive patterns of the members' recruitment to the community, which can help portray the system through which they were recruited. First, step number (1) experience enduring tensions in their lives was present in all members to some extent. Most of the members explicitly testified they were seeking solutions for environmental concerns they had, while those who did not declare they had such interests, did admit they had other tensions they were suffering from which they hoped to solve through the community. Two more steps that were evident in all members are (5) form an affective bond with one or more members of the group, and (7) be exposed to intensive interaction with other converts – in this case, other members. Yet it is important to highlight that for all members, the bond indicated in (5) was with Jiiji. Most of the members told about their encounters with him in detail, indicating these encounters were meaningful. Moreover, some also noted that they were intrigued by hearing other members talk about Jiiji, his abilities, and his profound contribution to their lives.

Two other steps of the model were evident, yet only occasionally and cannot be considered as a part of a consistent pattern in members' conversion process. Step (4) encounter the spiritual group to which they convert at a turning point in their lives, was partially present. Some of the members encountered KH years before they experienced any "turning point" (crisis, a decision they had to make, etc.), and it was only after they experienced such a point that they decided to become members. Some even did not experience such a "turning point" at

all, and gradually became members of the community. Moreover, step (6) reduce or eliminates external (out of the group) attachments, indeed present in the community as described in Chapter 7.3. yet many of the members are still in contact with their family and some of them even with friends. Members did admit that their ties with people who are not in the community were reduced, though this process can also happen merely by the fact they moved to live somewhere else, or started to work intensively.

Three steps of Lofland & Stark's model were seen very seldom if ever. Step (2) indicating that the potential member is within a religious problem-solving perspective (as opposed to a psychiatric or political problem-solving perspective) was never discussed. In fact, most members were seeking physical solutions for their environmental concerns, and a place to manifest their ecologic values and lifestyle. Therefore, step (3) think of themselves as a religious seeker, was also not true in most of the cases. In Emi's case, for example, she did mention she was hoping for someone who can help and lead her through her life-journey, yet she was not thinking of herself as a religious seeker per se. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the term "religion" is interpreted differently in Japan, as mentioned in chapter 2, and therefore, under some consideration Emi could be considered a religious seeker. Still, her story is not representative of most members interviewed and talked to during the field work. In summary, the Lofland & Stark model was found partially applicable in KH, and it should be looked into in more Japanese NRM and NNR to track its repetitive patterns and to better understand the order of the steps suggested.

When focusing on step (1) – experience enduring, acutely felt tensions in their lives – the tension evident in most members' narratives was between their ideal ecological lifestyle they would like to live according to, and their current lifestyle. Their interest in KH first began when they were introduced to KH's agricultural practices, organic agricultural products, environmental management workshops, or one of their programs, The Truth School or Natural Therapy Program. When trying to reduce this tension by visiting KH, spiritual needs arise as the community sees the greatest importance in spirituality and highlights it as the most important value individuals should aspire to. Moreover, the community, usually via Jiiji, also describes the path the individual should take to improve their spirituality, which can be done mainly by joining the community. This pattern is in correspondence with Wilson's (1979) argument that some NRM may awaken needs in the individual, according to the movement's ideology, and apply its sense and means for fulfillment.

The correlation that KH draws between environmentalism and spirituality stems from their holistic worldview, according to which the rising spiritual level of members, and in large

– of humanity – will improve, in turn, the environment by treating it better in ways that benefits it, as all elements, human and nature alike, are interconnected. This holistic worldview of seeing all elements in nature as a part of a diverse ecosystem, and on the other hand, the perception of humans as those who destroy the earth, may seem contradicting, yet KH perceive it as aligning with each other. In their understanding, all elements on earth are interconnected, but *because* humans separated themselves from nature, and started seeing it as a separate phenomenon, they started holding highly polluting practices.

These correlations of spirituality and environmentalism was evident in Japan and in the west, and some of KH's claims highly resonates with some environmental schools of thought, particularly Deep Ecology; however, the intrinsic value that all life should have, according to Deep Ecology, is interpreted somewhat differently in KH. Although the community is said to be operating in an environmentally-considerable way, in practice, some of their practices are highly polluting, while others align with anthropocentric environmentalism, which values resources only according to the benefits they provide to the community. When visiting the zoo for leisure, engaging in chicken raising methods that may involve killing male chicks, consuming single-use plastic tools for personal and commercial usage, and polluting the fields with plastic tarps as a part of their agricultural method, KH does not practice a type of environmentalism that sees all lives as valuable. Nature, including plants, animals, and the soil, are only valuable if they contribute to the community, its members and its growth. Whenever asked about these practices, the answer reveal spirituality as the end that justifies such means, as the members repeatedly argue that once humans have attained high spirituality, the condition of all lives will improve because the problem lies with people and how they see, treat, and *exchange their vibrancy* with the world.

By encouraging humans to improve their spirituality and live as one big family in order to reach a higher spiritual level, with no attachments, no ego, and constant attention on the *divine will*, KH sees themselves as the ultimate prototype for the future of human society, in which none of the current, self-destructive, human practices will occur. Then, neither humans nor nature will suffer from the malfunctioning of human society. This idea, that views all environmental problems as social problems, resonates with the perspective of Social Ecology. In principle, structures of domination and hierarchy are highly criticized in Social Ecology, and the capitalist system which preserves them is said to be unjust and in need of change. While KH also criticizes the capitalist worldview and unnecessary consumption and competition, the community also seems to display some of the values that Social Ecology stands against. Spiritual hierarchy in the community is very much present and determines whose opinion

matters, who can have a close relationship with the community leader, and sometimes, who can tell others what to do. By their elusive grading system, structures of control and domination are made and one person, Jiiji, has the ultimate level of control. In this sense, although KH understands all environmental problems as problems that stem from humans, and by large, by the society, it is unlike Social Ecology as structures of domination and control are guiding the operating system of the community.

Since the very early days of the community, the harder and better the work is done by the members, the higher the spiritual rank they receive, as agricultural work and achievements are said to be manifestations of spirituality. This rationale determines not only the hierarchy between nature and spirituality but also the different spiritual levels between members. Yet, it is not only by their work that members' spirituality is determined, but also by their willingness to share everything they own, physically, emotionally, and mentally. According to Jiiji, high spirituality can only develop when there are no attachments, since only then can members experience ultimate one-ness with the universe, as part of his holistic worldview. The attachments, Jiiji claims, are what makes the ego that separate humans from nature and from one another. In these settings of shared economic resources, the members have full dependency on the community, which is relied on to provide all of their physical, emotional, and mental needs. Furthermore, as it is a requirement to share all thoughts and emotions with everyone else in the community, everyone also knows everyone else's fears and weaknesses. However, it is said that this knowledge is useful as all the members are able to help each other to get over these fears and weaknesses by improving their spirituality and getting over the ego which forms them in the first place. By improving their spirituality, they believe that everything else will also improve. Hence, all the physical and psychological needs of members are provided for the price of being fully exposed and having nothing which they can consider as personal. Yet as members believe that KH is the only place they can improve their spirituality, which in turn will improve both society as a whole and the natural environment, they see no other option but to stay in the community.

The stated purpose of KH is to be "one big family beyond blood relations", with nature as its blueprint. Just as the beehive model depicts how the community should operate, without separation between different family units and with the majority of the members serving as "worker bees", with only a few at the top, KH tries to live life according to the natural world in what they view as the best structure to live by. This idea that the community, or society at large, should operate as the natural world does has been used throughout history by ruling elites as they have sought to equate the hierarchical construction of the society they rule with the

natural order of things. By doing so, they have insinuated that their systems of domination are nothing but natural, biological, and unalterable. Yet conversely, humans' view of nature has historically been inspired by the way they see society. Examples of this can be seen in the dualism of Greek society, manifested in slave versus master, city versus countryside, and the cultivated versus the wild (White, 2003). In hierarchical medieval society, they also depicted nature as the animal kingdom, in which the lion was the king of the beasts, and the rest of the animals had ranks according to their strength and contribution. Since the 18th century, nature has been said to operate by its own market economy, where individuals fight for survival and only the strong survive in a process of natural-selection. With this being the case, it is suggested that Jiiji also employs ideas of natural arrangements to justify his structure of domination in the community. He is the queen of the hive, young women are those who can have intercourse with him and bear the new generation of the community, and the rest of the members are the worker bees.

When looking into the formation of this beehive structure, all members agree that it is the vision of Jiiji manifested, and they comply with it. Jiiji was the one who formulated the idea of the community, including the aspiration to live as one big family, their spiritual beliefs, chants, teams, practices and all of the other components that make up KH. He was the one who integrated the idea of environmentalism within spirituality. It is his ever-adapting vision that determines every aspect of community life, as he is trusted as the only authority that can directly communicate with the divine. Therefore, when there are contradictions between some of the values of KH, he is the one to decide which path the community will take. According to Jiiji, environmentalism is inferior to spirituality since the former stems from the latter; spirituality is the key to solving all problems, social and environmental alike. Therefore, even if KH practices harm the environment, as long as they serve the goal of raising awareness of the community, making other people interested in KH, engaging more curious individuals in actions that should bring them to spiritual improvement, and raising members' spirituality, the ends justify the means. Actions are labeled as good or bad according to their contribution to the community. Good practices can be producing profitable agricultural products, selling meals based on KH organic products that will be delicious and by that increase the community's reputation, and building a website that presents KH as a utopian community users would like to visit. Some of these practices, however, have harming effects over the environment, such as polluting practices like heavy plastic usage. Yet, if such practices make a contribution to the community, then these are sacrifices that should be made.

Furthermore, all actions which raise the spiritual level of members are considered as good for the community. In this sense, creating art that glorifies the community is good, sexual relations that should increase the spiritual level of members are good, and obedience to Jiiji, as he is the divine messenger and the undisputed spiritual leader of the community, is also considered as good. Doing the opposite is, by default, bad. Therefore, members are not free to do as they wish, as any of their actions that do not align with what is good for the community will be met with heavy criticism. In fact, releasing all attachments to what they wish to do is considered as the best practice and as a proof to *getting over the ego*. KH is the organization best placed to save society, and ultimately the earth, from its illnesses, as it is the only place where people understand the *truth*, and no other community, movement or group have the privilege of having a leader who directly communicates with the divine.

Although Jiiji encourages all members to *make themselves empty* and to *listen to the divine will*, most of them admit that they find it hard to practice such listening, and therefore they turn to the highest spiritual authority in the community when they need advice or a better understanding of what they should do. Yet this top-down structure does not only apply when members seek advice, but for all information about the community, including rules, beliefs and other norms. This information is transmitted to the members by Jiiji or members who are close to him, and the adult members then pass it on to the children of the community. This information flow is based on trust and faith that Jiiji is indeed communicating with the divine, as he claims, and that is also what makes him more significant than any external authority such as the biological family, the education system or the state.

When members do not understand exactly what behavior is expected of them, as they do not completely comprehend the spiritual ideas KH is based upon, it is easier for them to accept Jiiji scolding them, since the possibility that they have done something wrong without understanding it always exists. This acceptance is based on the belief that KH is an important place to be a part of, and that complying with Jiiji's ideas and requests means that they are on the way to improving their spirituality. This in turn will eventually improve society and the condition of the earth. They accept it because they believe that despite the fact that all living things should be in harmony with one another, every person is in charge of their own spiritual growth. While Jiiji constantly brings up the forthcoming *qualitative shift*, it is unclear whether KH members need to enhance their spirituality to enable that shift to occur or whether it will happen regardless. Either way, members believe they should live the role they were given by the divine, which they can only understand comprehensively in KH.

KH members believe that the community is the ultimate prototype for future society, which they believe will be based on high spirituality, community living, and organic agriculture. Believing that only the community is right and all else is wrong helps members to see the separation from their family, friends, and external society as natural and essential. It also strengthens the belief that once they are members, they will be members for life, as there is no other place for them to be. Therefore, members will not risk their spiritual growth or their environmental goals by not committing fully to their only home, the community. They fully believe that they have a responsibility toward society and the earth, as they are the ones who understand the importance of spiritual improvement and their innate responsibility as Japanese, as they believe they are the descendants of the Katakamuna people, who led a utopian society 13,000 years ago.

KH is a spiritual community that attracts new members by offering environmental solutions and education, as well as knowledge about community life. Their authority in this field derives from their self-sufficiency, the centrality of organic agriculture in the community, and the fact that they gain income from organic agriculture. When a new guest or visitor arrives in the community, they introduce them to the spiritual ideas they hold, which, in their view, the environmental aspects of the community and its structure derive from. The guest or visitor is also encouraged to share what they think or feel, an action that increases the probability of them sharing more in the future and feeling a closer connection to the community. When there, the visitors can form connections with other members who have been through the same process, and develop a bond with Jiiji, whom many of the current members said they developed a deep respect for. While every individual goes through a different process on the path toward becoming a member, the importance of the community and its contribution to the reformation of the world is frequently mentioned by current community members in the hope that the guest or visitor will also develop such a judgment. The guest will become a member only when they have accepted the idea that spiritual development is the most important value they should aspire for and KH is the ultimate place to increase their spirituality.

While some guests or visitors are eventually convinced that the community is the ultimate place to live in for the sake of the world, nature, and the future of society, and, no less importantly, for their own spiritual development, some do not develop this way of thinking and do not become KH members. Those who do become members are then bound to KH rules and norms and are asked to adopt them all in order to be valid members of the community. Members who dispute the rules and norms are bound for criticism by other members and by Jiiji, who is

the one member who determines those norms and rules. While all the other members highly respect Jiiji, as they see him as the highest spiritual authority in the community, and by extension, in the world, nonconforming members might find themselves socially outcast. On the other hand, those who observe Jiiji's rules and norms gain a higher evaluation from Jiiji, which quickly trickles into the consciousness of other members and informs their perception of the conforming member. Eventually, those who continually conform and perform acts that are of high utility to the community will be considered to have high spirituality, while those who are less obedient or perform actions with lower levels of utility for the community will be considered spiritually inferior. Those with higher spirituality will be listened to and their opinions valued by other members, while those with lower spirituality will generally be less appreciated by other members, and even, eventually, themselves. This mechanism shapes the hierarchical structure of the community and its structure of control.

In conclusion, the recruitment mechanism of KH begins when potential-members first hear or become aware of the community. Most of them gain interest in the community thanks to its reputation as a place with solutions to environmental problems. Then, when visiting the community, these potential-members encounter members who have been through the same process and glorify the community. The potential-members also encounter Jiiji and start developing relations with him. Simultaneously, they are introduced to KH spiritual doctrines and the community's practices to raise the spirituality, which is, according to KH, an environmental practice no less than organic agriculture. When potential-members become members, the recruitment mechanism continues as the rules and norms of KH, and their practice to *get over the* ego requires members to continuously work hard to fulfill their new goal: increasing their spirituality. And ultimately, increasing the spirituality means either *listening to the divine will* themselves, or asking for help in this domain from Jiiji who is known as the spiritual leader that can communicate with the divine. Living in the community, then, means that members are subordinate to Jiiji.

Hierarchy requires a top-down, authoritarian set-up, set rules, intentionality, and an arrangement that was designed to provide a framework for operation. In the animal kingdom, these relations are not hierarchical but instinctual. There is no intentional organization or forethought. Therefore, KH differs from what Social Ecologists would call First Nature, and cannot claim to operate as the natural world does, but is a human community through and through. With a high level of conformity and spirituality that serves as an evaluative tool for members, KH is ultimately both environmental and spiritual community operating through structures of hierarchy and domination, based on the worldview of a charismatic leader, who

justifies his deeds as a reflection of the natural world, and his position on his exclusive ability to communicate with the divine.

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11. Appendix

11.1. Appendix 1 – Katakamuna Syllables Meanings

ひ HI: one (hitotsu), secret (hisoka), to open (hiraku), to echo (hibiku), light (hikari), day (hi), fire (hi), sun (hi), a starting point from stillness to motion, the beginning of things

ふ HU: two (futatsu), to vibrate (furueru), to touch (fureru), deep (fukai), to fill / block (fusagu), to bend down (fusu), to increase (fueru), to swell (fukuramu), to gain weight (futoru), a stage where two contradictory characteristics that expand and contract spread as fluctuation

み MI: fill (michiru); water (mizu); honeydew (mitsu); path (michi); body (mi); something in Sensho-kado (Ama-kai: the world between the potential world and the phenomenal world); something consisting of electricity, magnetism and force; something that you cannot see, but can feel with your mind

よ YO: evil (yokoshima); confusion; world (yo); night (yoru); to get drunk (you); a state where energy was divided into Sei Han (forward and reverse) at the stage HU, went beyond the stage MI, developed into forward and reverse further, flowed evilly, and became a rotating vortex flow

い I: position (ichi); the first particle that appears in the phenomenal world; something combining five physical elementary quantum components of electricity, magnetism, force, time and place; the energy of I is uneven and has differences (SA), and this is called ISA meaning "Let's do it."

ま MA: space (ma); sphere space divided by circular orbit of MARI; independent MA is TAMA, minute MA is MARI, the galactic universe is called AMATAMA, and the great universe is called TAKAMA

わ WA: spherical like a hollow ball, the image of bubble ring (wa)

り LI: separation (bunri) from the substance

て TE: dual nature

め ME: a sprout (me); eyes (me); something that develops with the course of time; something that has broad expansion out of sight, although its part that has come to the surface is small

く KU: freedom, free, to spin (kuru), to rotate and roll around freely when thread is spun.

る LU: to maintain the existence, the state to continue action

む MU: six (mutsu); to generate (musu); six directions of up and down, right and left, front and back = to gain volume = the occurrence of a substance with quality and quantity; nothing (if something expands or contracts infinitely, it feels like it is only nothing)

な NA: seven (nanatsu), to become (naru), a qualitative shift, to transform into totally different thing suddenly, a divided being (divided spirit) after qualitative shift

や YA: eight (yatsu), to become saturated and stabilize, calm (yasusragi), limit, abundance, the fractal figure of the most stable element with eight electrons on its orbit

こ KO: nine (kokonotsu); to transcend (koeru) the limit (YA); to roll over (korogaru); to repeat; a particle that transcends, rolls over and stretches; small (ko); an individual (ko)

と TO: an integrated (tougo) substance, a high-dimensional substance, absolute time and space integrating as infinite time and space, to blend (tokekomu)

あ A: existence as a high-dimensional vibration, combined syllables of HI and TO

う U: a vortex (uzu) of cosmic space (AMA), all phenomena are born (umareru) here, the high- density of MI is rotated by 90 degrees in a forward direction by A

の NO: to extend/ stretch (nosu), a spatial and quantitative growth on the horizontal (space) line

す SU: to be doing/ to continue (suru), a progression to the limit, the prime (su), purity (sumu), to live (sumu)

へ HE: an edge (heri), a layer (he), periphery of the cosmos (AMA), parallel (heikou), a flat space

し SHI: to show (shimeshi), something shown as a phenomenon

れ LE: a state of excess energy that spills over (koboreru), to overflow (afureru), to become steamed (mureru), to become rough (areru), to wither (kareru), the state where energy transcends nine (KO) and becomes exceedingly close to 10 (TO) like 9.9999

か KA: a universally infinitesimal particle, the underlying energy that exists universally regardless of the microcosm and macrocosm of the universe, energy whose direction is non-constant and that will not manifest as a force

た TA: separation and independence, to stand (tatsu), to sever (tatsu), a fractal like in cell division

ち CHI: to become sustained/ to continue, the state where KA rotates by 90 degrees in a forward direction and energy concentrates on the vertical (time) line

さ SA: a difference (sa), velocity and direction differ as an emergent flow of MARI through a rotational motion, to tear (saku), to bloom (saku), the beginning of motion that emerges from the divergent energy levels in space, identity, a narrow gap

き KI: to emerge/ to start (ki), a tree (ki), life (ki), prana (ki), emergence on the horizontal (space) line, the beginning of substance and life

そ SO: to deviate (soreru) from combination, an exchange/ interaction between the phenomenal world and the manifest world

ら LA: a place where invisible energy exists; something in common with the sky (sora), a shell/ husk (kara), back (ura) and seat (kura)

に NI: to become established as form, to load (ni), to resemble (niru), to boil (niru)

も MO: a hazy state where the outline is vague, alga (chlorophyll-plant cells) (mo) connects like fabric and develops into various things

ろ LO: a hollow state, gauze (ro), furnace (ro), a multicellular and porous organism like a water net that develops into a state like gauze, a hollow body with a mass

け KE: a suspicious (keshiki) substance; a sign (kehai); a specter (mononoke); something that you can feel exists, but you cannot see

せ SE: back (se), shallows/ rapids (se), narrow (semai), to hurry (seku), concentrated energy, these places have high energy levels

ゆ YU: to swing/ to sway (yuragu), to gush out lambently (yurayurato) in a chaotic world

ゑ YE: to smile (emu), fruit ripens and falls, to feed (esa)

ぬ NU: something that is invisible, but firm and stable

お O: to expand and contract infinitely toward six directions (front and back, right and left, up and down), big (ookii), heavy (omoi), back (oku - potential space)

を WO: to reach the back (O) and fall into place; to have opposite meanings such as man (wotoko) and woman (wonna), a leader (wosa), a male (wosu), tail (wo), dirt (wo), uncleanness (wo)

は HA: a force to attract each other arises/ occurs (hassei)

え E: emergence/ occurrence/ generation (hassei); a stage where energy grows and shifts by the course of time (the forward direction - manifestation) from the potential world to the phenomenal world, and emerges

つ TSU: to gather (tsudou), to mate (tsugau), a high-dimensional (TO) specific space

ゐ YI: enlightenment; the combined syllables of SA and KI; when energy shifts its quality (NA), it

becomes saturated and stabilizes (YA), transcends (KO) the limit (YA), where it reaches fully (TO), and consolidates (TO). Then, the limit of a sphere (WA) melts (TO) and the differences in density are removed (SATORI), and it returns to the underlying state of high-dimensionalization (A). YI has such a sublime process with numbers when things proceed.

ね NE: to root (ne), the source, to spread out long and infinitely

ほ HO: polarized opposite qualities (male and female) continue to attract each other, an ear of rice/ ear of corn (ho), the feeling that emerges when males and females face each other

ん N: the existence of force that starts and generates each state, strengthens the previous syllable

11.2. Appendix 2 – Konohana Family Member Applicant Interview Sheet

11.2.1. Japanese version (original)

木の花ファミリーメンバー希望者面接シート

面談日　　年　月　日

フリガナ		生年月日		男 ・ 女	
氏名		年　　月　　日			歳
住所	〒				
電話番号		メールアドレス			
基礎年金番号		年金の支払状況			
社会保険加入状況		疾病既往症			
食生活、嗜好品など					
所有資産					
経済事情					
趣味と特技		資格			
移住の動機		移住予定日：　　年　月　日 実際の移住日：　　年　月　日			

緊急連絡先

フリガナ		続柄	電話番号
氏名			

家族構成　　　　　　　　　　　　　　学歴・職歴

意識調査

1. 木の花ファミリーでは、経済、精神性などすべてのものをみんなと共有します。そのことを理解していますか?またそのことについてあなたはどう思いますか?

2. 木の花ファミリーではメンバーはみな常に全体のために生きることを心掛けています。そのことを理解していますか?またあなたはそのことについてどう思いますか?

3. メンバーになる前には一定の体験滞在期間があり、その後1年間の仮メンバー期間があります。そして、この期間は分配金の支給はありません。加えて、生活費は自己負担していただきます。そのことを理解していますか?またあなたはそのことについてどう思いますか?

4. メンバーになるということはファミリーの一員として生涯を送ることです。そのような自覚があなたにありますか?

5. その他メンバーになるにあたっての抱負を自由に記述して下さい。

私は規約の内容を理解した上で、この用紙の記入をしています。

署名:　　　　　　　印

11.2.2. English version (translated by Shahar Lilia Griffin)

Konohana Family New Member Applicant Interview Sheet

Interview date: _____/____/____

Name (furikana)		Birthday		M・F
Name (kanji)		_____/___/___		year-old
address	〒			
Phone number		Email		
Pension number		Payment status of pension		
Social insurance subscription status		Medical background		
Diet, preferences etc.				
Owned assets				
Economic circumstances				
Hobbies and skills		qualifications		
Motivation for joining				
		Estimated joining date : _____/___/___		
		Actual joining date : _____/___/___		

Emergency contact

Name (furikana)		Relations	Phone number
Name (kanji)			

Family structure   Education・Employment

Awareness questionnaire

1. In Konohana Family the economics, spirituality etc. are shared. Do you comprehend the meaning of this? What do you think about this?

2. In Konohana Family, the members are keeping in mind that they are living for the sake of everything. Do you comprehend the meaning of this? What do you think about this?

3. Before becoming a member, there is a fixed period of stay as a trial, and then a one-year provisional-member period. During this period, there would be no payment[16], and all living expenses would be carried out by the provisional-member. Do you comprehend the meaning of this? What do you think about this?

4. To become a member means being a member for a lifetime. Do you have such consciousness?

---

[16] No payment from the community to the provisional member

5. Please describe freely other ambitions you have regarding becoming a member:

In witness whereof, as I completely understanding the terms of the contract I sign this form:

Signature_____ seal

11.3 Appendix 3 – The Age of Miroku song lyrics

11.3.1. Japanese version (original)

「みろくの世」

この星を天国にするために

はじめに雛形として

天国になる国があるという

それが大和という国

命（ぬち）どう宝なりこの国の人は

そのことをみんな知っているよ

生きとし生けるもののつながりと

みんなの笑顔があふれている

この海を航海して

向こうに見えてくるのは

小さな　緑ゆたかな　水清く

あふるる　龍のかたちの島

この星を天国にするために

はじまりの神の御魂から分かれ

幾星霜（いくせいそう）の年月を生まれ変わって

みろくの世を創る

地中深く封じられた　本物の神様が

今やっと地の底から表に現れて

ともに目覚むる魂たちよ

この星の上に降り立った　御魂たちよ

この星を天国にするために

善と悪との大芝居

その筋書きは誰も知らぬままに

壮大なドラマの中にある

われらはみろくの世を創るために
外に見る　暗闇の大本を
自分の心の中に見つけてゆく
この星を天国にするために

分かれた体をまたひとつにつないでゆく

この星を天国にするために
この星を天国にするために
この星を天国にするために

11.3.2. English translation (translation by Konohana Family Community)

The world of Miroku　(Utopia)

To make this planet heaven

First, as a model

It is said there is a country to become heaven

That is the country called "Yamato (Japan)"

Life is treasure

All the people of this country

Know that

With connection of all the lives

And full of everyone's smile

When we are sailing in this sea

What will come in sight over there

Is the small dragon-shaped island

Full of green and clear water

To make this planet heaven

We were separated from the beginning Divine soul,

Have reincarnated over a long period

And are about to create the world of Miroku

The genuine God that was contained deep in the ground

Has appeared to the surface from the bottom of the ground at last

Souls that are going to awake together

Souls that set foot on this planet

To make this planet heaven

Great performance of good and evil

Whose scenario nobody knows

Is in the grand drama

To create the world of Miroku

We are going to find in our own hearts

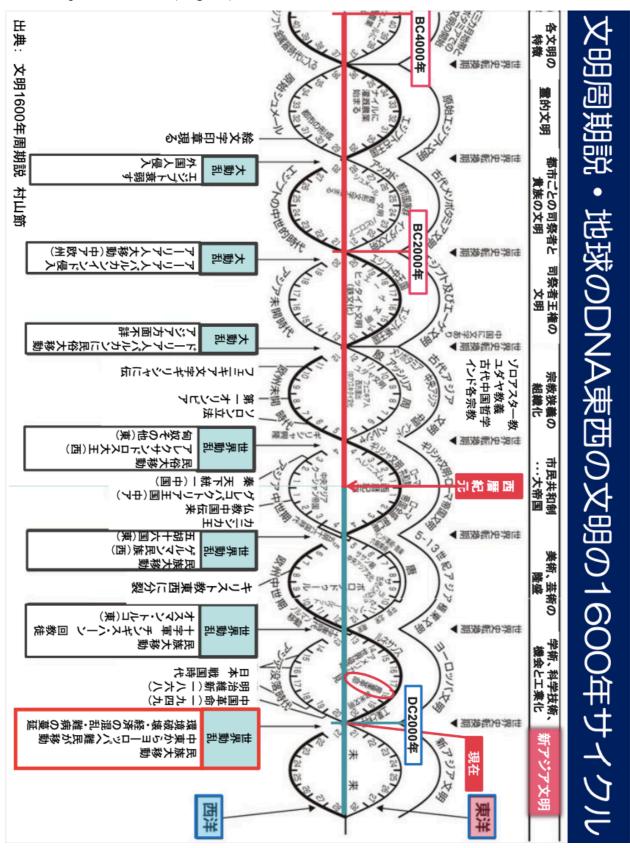The root of the darkness that we see outside

To make this planet heaven

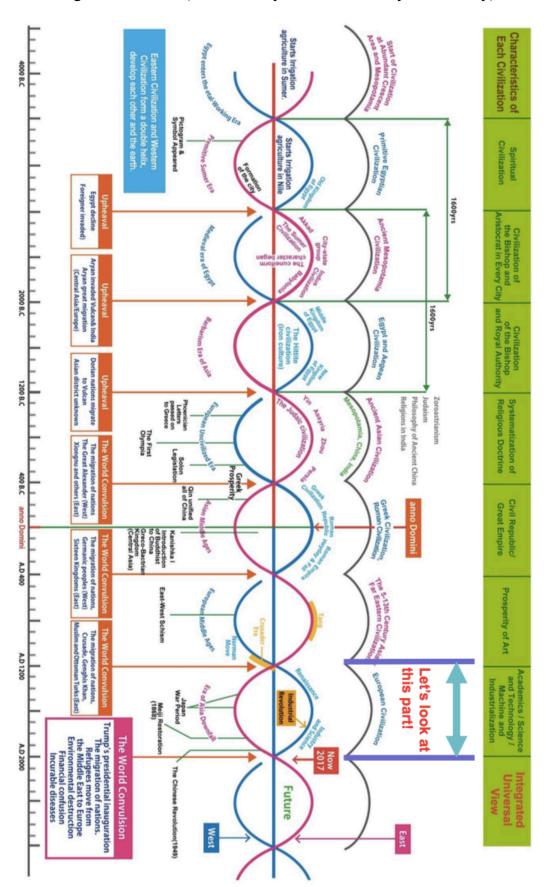We are going to connect separate bodies back to one

To make this planet heaven

To make this planet heaven

To make this planet heaven

11.4. Appendix 4 – Misao Murayama 1,600 Years Civilization Cycle Theory

11.4.1. Japanese version (original)

11.4.2. English translation (translation by Konohana Family Community)

The 1600-year Cycle of the Eastern and Western Civilizations

Characteristics of Each Civilization	
Spiritual Civilization	
Civilization of the Bishop and Aristocrat in Every City	
Civilization of the Bishop and Royal Authority	Systematization of Religious Doctrine
	Civil Republic/ Great Empire
	Prosperity of Art
	Academics / Science and Technology / Machine and Industrialization
	Integrated Universal View

Eastern Civilization and Western Civilization form a double helix, develop each other and the earth.

Starts Irrigation agriculture in Sumer.
Starts Irrigation agriculture in Nile
Egypt enters the eat-Working Era
Pictogram & Symbol Appeared
Primitive Sumer Era
Formation of the city

Start of Civilization at Abundant Crescent Area and Mesopotamia
Primitive Egyptian Civilization
Ancient Mesopotamia Civilization
Egypt and Aegean Civilization

1600yrs
1600yrs

Upheaval
Egypt decline
Foreigner invaded)

Medieval era of Egypt
The Sumer Civilization
City-state group
The cuneiform character began
Akked
Babylonia
Indus Civilization

Upheaval
Aryan invaded Vulcan& India
Aryan great migration
(Central Asia/Europe)

Barbarism Era of Asia
The Hittite civilization (Iron culture)

Upheaval
Dorian nations migrate to Vulcan
Asian district unknown

European Uncivilized Era
Phoenician Letters passed on to Greece
The First Olympia
Solon Legislation
Qin unified all of China

The Judaic civilization
Yin Asyria Zhou Persia
Greek Civilization
Roman Republic History

Ancient Asian Civilization
Mesopotamia, China, India
Greek Civilization, Roman Civilization

Zoroastrianism
Judaism
Philosophy of Ancient China
Religions in India

anno Domini

Upheaval
The World Convulsion
The Great Alexander (West)
Xiongnu and others (East)

Greek Prosperity
Asian Middle Ages
Kanishka I
Introduction of Buddhist to China
Greco-Bactrian Kingdom (Central Asia)

The World Convulsion
Germanic peoples (West)
Sixteen Kingdoms (East)

East-West Schism
European Middle Ages
Norman Move
Crusader Era
Tang

The 5-13th Century Asian Far Eastern Civilization, European Civilization

Let's look at this part!

The World Convulsion
The migration of nations,
Crusade, Genghis Khan,
Muslim and Ottoman Turks (East)

Renaissance
Industrial Revolution
Era of Asia Downfall
Meiji Restoration (1868)
Japan War Period

Now 2017

The World Convulsion
Trump's presidential inauguration
The migration of nations.
Refugees move from the Middle East to Europe
Environmental destruction
Financial confusion
Incurable diseases

The Chinese Revolution (1949)

Future

West
East

4000 B.C 2000 B.C 1200 B.C 400 B.C anno Domini A.D 400 A.D 1200 A.D 2000

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