Religious Innovation for Sustainability

Greening God in the Japanese New Religious Movement Seichō no Ie

Marius Lian

Master Thesis in Development, Environment and Cultural Change

Centre for Development and Environment

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Spring 2019

2019

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http://www.duo.uio.no/

Print: Reprosentralen, University of Oslo

Abstract

As we grapple with our relationships with nature in search of sustainable solutions in our precarious age, religion has entered the sphere of environmentalism. Offering religious ideas as a key to sustainability, some have even been as bold to suggest religion as a panacea to all our environmental ills. In recent years this also rings true in part to the Japanese new religious movement Seichō no Ie that, since its inception in 1930, has in recent years made large scale efforts to 'go green'. The thesis discusses Seichō no Ie's transformation and, through fieldwork and interviews, explores what steps Seichō no Ie, both on a whole and through its individual members, are taking to contribute towards a sustainable future, how Seichō no Ie is framing the environmental crisis through their publications, activities and in discussions regarding ecological issues, and lastly, what the driving forces behind the greening of Seichō no Ie are according to its adherents. The thesis presents the concrete environmental initiatives of Seichō no Ie as observed during fieldwork at several Seichō no Ie facilities throughout Japan. It also illustrates how religiously inspired ecological ideas can manifest themselves in active measures. Interviews were chosen to get first-hand information from members and are analysed and coded in line with narrative analysis to explore the meanings members ascribed to the green shift taking place in Seichō no Ie. Finally frame analysis is employed to the same interviews to grasp Seichō no Ie's larger cognitive framework. The thesis adds to the discussion on religion and the environment and shows the complex relationships that are behind the process of 'greening' and how religions are changing in the face of climate change.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to express my deep gratitude to my thesis supervisor research professor Nina Witoszek of the Centre for Development and Environment at the University of Oslo for her valuable input, which has greatly formed this work and for consistently guiding my paper in the right direction whenever I strayed too far. I also extend my thanks to my co-supervisor associate professor Aike Peter Rots of the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the University of Oslo, whose expertise in Japanese religions was of great assistance whenever I encountered questions about my research and gave my work focus.

My thanks also go out to Seichō no Ie and its members who have all been essential to this project through their greatly appreciated hospitality, assistance and insights throughout my fieldwork. This would truly not have been possible without them.

Finally I must express my gratitude to my peers at the Centre for Development and Environment and my dear friends whose continued support and friendships gave me the strength to write this thesis. Thank you.

Marius Lian

Note on the Text

Japanese terms are written according to the common Hepburn transcription method, with long vowels being indicated by a macron. The exception to this is common geographical names (such as Tokyo and Kyoto) and words that have been incorporated into English (such as Shinto rather than *shintō*). Any Japanese names are written in the standard fashion of family names followed by given names. The names of my informants are all pseudonyms to keep them anonymous.

All quotes and their translations have been done by me unless stated otherwise. I use Japanese script sparingly throughout the thesis to enrich the text or better convey meaning when necessary for lack of better alternatives.

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1 Introduction

In stark contrast to the bustling atmosphere of Hachiōji station merely an hour or so earlier during Tokyo's morning rush, I was struck by the calm surrounding forests as the one-car train slowly made its way up the misty hillside of the Yatsugatake Mountains. Among the impressive cedars and moss covered rocks, evocative of the mysterious forests of Hayao Miyazaki's acclaimed 1997 anime *Princess Mononoke*, I finally arrived at my destination: Kai-Ōizumi station. Being the only one stepping off the train, I was warmly greeted by Mr. Kinoshita, a representative of Seichō no Ie (生長の家 lit. the House of Growth), recognizable by an enamel pin worn on his lapel with the new religious movement's logo. This man was to accompany me from the station further into the forest, where Seichō no Ie's international headquarters, dubbed the 'Office in the Forest', are now located. Seichō no Ie is one of Japan's many new religious movements, founded in 1930 by Taniguchi Masaharu with a doctrine inspired by several religious traditions such as Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity and New Thought[1].

The move from their former neighbourhood of Harajuku, Tokyo to the forests of Yamanashi prefecture took place in 2013 as one of Seichō no Ie's multiple initiatives to lead by example and minimize their environmental impact. The goal of my visit was to better understand these environmental initiatives and the driving forces behind them, with their new international headquarters representing the embodiment of Seichō no Ie's environmental ideals. What emerged from the mist as I was driven along the forested roads, was a modern wooden clad facility on an impressive scale for a new religious movement, a testament to their size which is claimed to be around 460,000 adherents in Japan alone according to the Agency for Cultural Affairs[2] (Bunkachō 2017, 86-87). In the aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and following tsunami that caused tremendous damage across eastern Japan, including the disaster of radiation leaking from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactors, the plans for the 'Office in the Forest' took a new direction, with renewed plans aiming for complete energy self-sufficiency.

[1] A mind-healing movement based on religious and metaphysical presuppositions that may be traced to the dissatisfaction with scientific empiricism and religious skepticism of the 17th and 18th century. Though difficult to generalize, they commonly emphasize the "immanence of God, the divine nature of man, the immediate availability of God's power to man, the spiritual character of the universe, and the fact that sin, human disorders, and human disease are basically matters of incorrect thinking" (Britannica Academic 2016).

[2] Statistics relating to religious membership in Japan are notoriously known for their arbitrariness as this information is shared on a voluntary basis (Astley 2006, 96-98).

The new international headquarter for Seichō no Ie thus became Japan's first zero emission building (ZEB) the following summer.

A range of technological innovations were used to make Seichō no Ie's environmental impact as small as possible. From using energy saving lightbulbs, natural lighting, and insulation along with double glazed windows (a rare thing in Japan from my experience, as well as anyone spending an extended period of time in Japan during colder months), to generating their own electric power through solar photovoltaic systems and the burning of local biomass, the plans for the 'Office in the Forest' managed to exceed Seichō no Ie's expectations of energy self-sufficiency. Doing so allowed the headquarters to sell their energy surplus back to the grid, becoming a positive energy building. The construction process was equally influenced by Seichō no Ie's environmental concern by choosing environmentally friendly materials, and choosing to source over 90 % of timber from local cedar and larch, with the remaining timber sourced from neighbouring prefectures, all from Forest Stewardship Council certified forestry (Seichō no Ie 2013, 5). Even the rock removed to give way for the foundations of the building were given a new use as storage for thermal energy under the building in order to regulate the indoor climate without overly relying on air-conditioning. The indoor climate is regulated through the opening of windows that allow for natural breezes to keep the facility cool in summer, and through solar heating for colder seasons. Furthermore, a small fleet of electrical cars and minibuses are used to transport the office workers between home and work, while the cafeteria takes pride in serving meat-free (though they do include fish) and mostly locally sourced and seasonal meals, all in the name of "representing a model of humans and nature living together as a harmonious civilization" and the reduction of CO_2.

The warm and organic feel of the wooden interior, along with the large windows that "let the surrounding nature in," as one informant put it, gives the sense of Seichō no Ie being a religious organization that truly is concerned for the environment and actively seeks to change the direction of our planetary future through their activities. This raises many questions: What is it that motivates these actions? How does Seichō no Ie frame the environmental crisis? And how do they believe they can contribute towards the innovations necessary for overcoming the impending environmental crisis? For an organization that seemed no more concerned with the environment than most other religious groups only a few years ago according to Staemmler (2011b, 155-156), the

growth of Seichō no Ie's environmental ambitions and goals presents an interesting case of the 'greening' of religion, and the role religions, both in Japan and elsewhere, can play in communicating environmentalism, adopting the role as a potential source for much needed cultural innovations for sustainability. Through a handful of renewable energy projects and the implementation of international environmental standards, on top of its *Walden*-like retreat to the forests of Yamanashi prefecture, Seichō no Ie has without a doubt considerably upped their environmental efforts.

1.1 Rationale and Research Aims of this Study

Academic work on the topic of 'religion and the environment' in Japan has only recently come forth as a larger field of research. Several scholars have explored Buddhism and how it relates to the natural environment and has proved to be a source for inspiration for many. On the other hand, academic debates surrounding Shinto have been more focused on its pre-war past and its links to the emperor or role in Japanese nationalism. In recent years however, there has been an increasing interest in several 'religious environmentalist paradigms', with the 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm' being the inspiration for my research aims (Kalland 2008, Pedersen 1995, Rots 2017). The term 'Shinto environmentalist paradigm' is used to "refer to the trend to conceptualise Shinto as a worship tradition intimately connected with 'nature', and the explicit discursive association with 'the environment', 'nature conservation', and 'ecology'" (Rots 2017, 67). Shinto is in no way unique in this innovative process of 'greening', as the activities of Seichō no Ie above suggest, implying the existence of other and hitherto unexplored religious 'environmentalist paradigms' in Japan. The emergence of an environmental consciousness in Seichō no Ie over the past years highlights a trend of 'greening' as recently seen in mainstream Shrine Shinto[3], which served as further inspiration for my investigation and fieldwork. Considering that research on this field in general is somewhat lacking, even less has been done to explore Japan's new religions in the light of a potential environmental turn. Through these considerations, I highlight the pioneering nature of this study.

[3] Shrine Shinto as a term (as opposed to folk or sectarian practices) applies to the successors of the state administered supra-religious version of Shinto that resulted from pre-war state intervention. Over 80,000 of these shrines formed the Association of Shinto Shrines and no longer receive governmental financial support. For more details on Shinto in the post-war period see Hardacre (2017) and her chapter on the subject.

What this master's thesis seeks to accomplish is to explore the above themes and motivations behind greening religion in the context of Seichō no Ie. Throughout my thesis I acknowledge that religion is but a small fragment of a solution to our environmental ills, with political, economic, social, cultural, as well as ecological contributors playing their part in both finding and obstructing a potential ecological transformation. However, considering the scale and extent of the issue, a holistic and equally far-reaching approach is sorely needed, meaning an exploration of religion, as one of many facets, in relation to the environment is equally deserving of our attention and consideration in a sustainable future. As is implied above, there are ripples of change running through the religious world as orthodoxy is being challenged in the face of environmental degradation. Such innovative changes to religious practice, organization or belief in order to quell an eco-crisis are what I term 'religious innovations for sustainability', which constitutes the main topic of this work.

The main question that is raised in this thesis is threefold: firstly, what steps are being taken by the Shinto-derived[4] new religion Seichō no Ie to contribute towards a sustainable future? Secondly, what are the driving forces behind the greening of Seichō no Ie according to its adherents? And lastly, how does Seichō no Ie frame the environmental crisis through their publications, activities and in discussions regarding ecological issues? These questions place Seichō no Ie in a much larger context of academic work on the subject, allowing me also to discuss the role religion can play in altering ecological attitudes, ideas of sustainability as well as views on the relationship between humans and nature through the eyes various religious traditions in comparison with the religious movement that is the focus of this thesis.

1.2 On the Methodology of Fieldwork

My fieldwork was conducted during the months of September and October of 2017, with my time spent in the areas of Kyoto and Tokyo. As my focus was on religious movement with an international presence, I chose to restrict myself to Japan due to my academic background and the movement's larger presence in Japan. I could also have

[4] This way of classifying new religious movements as 'Shinto-derived', according to Shimazono (1979, 389), "starts from the existence of certain "big" historical religions to which the New Religions can be thought of as related by virtue of their objects of worship, rituals, scriptures, doctrines, and the like. This does not mean, however, that the New Religions actually sprang from … Shinto bodies."

chosen almost any prefecture in Japan, but with my limited time, I chose to restrict my fieldwork to larger urban areas I was better acquainted with, having previously spent longer periods of time in both places. The presence of larger Seichō no Ie facilities, in or close to the above-mentioned areas, also served as motivation for the selection, with the international headquarters being reachable by train from Tokyo and the Seichō no Ie Additional Main Temple located in Uji, south of Kyoto. Gaining access to these locations became an early goal in the research process. The scale and time frame of the project proved to be a challenge for a single master's student. However, my endeavours proved fruitful as I was able to collect a large amount of data. Rather than focusing on a smaller community, which would demand a longer ethnographic study, I attempted to get a more general sense of Seichō no Ie's environmental activities from a range of people through limited ethnographic fieldwork. Due to the limited time frame I also chose to be as flexible as possible to allow me to jump at any opportunity that might present itself.

My informants were found through snowball sampling, with me contacting the different facilities by email, informing them of the purpose of my studies and on what the interview would entail, and asking if the informants knew of anyone who would be interested in being interviewed or if they could put me into contact with other potential informants. This proved successful, and I was invited to visit several Seichō no Ie locations and events to see, and inquire about, their environmental activities. With the above-mentioned time restraints and scale of the project, only a small number of informants were found, giving me a limited basis for argumentation. However, the data gleaned from my informants provide a sufficient basis for my exploratory study as well as for future research on the subject.

In total, a series of thirteen interviews varying in 30-60 minutes in length were conducted where two were done in a group setting and the remaining with individual informants. This brought the final number of informants participating to eighteen, all sharing a connection with Seichō no Ie, being members, administrative workers, or ordained ministers of the new religious movement. Due to ethical considerations and the nature of my study, informants were anonymised, keeping details of each informant to the minimum of age, gender and occupation or connection to Seichō no Ie. This was done to protect informants as they might divulge sensitive or personal information or

views. Of these eighteen participants men and women were equally represented in numbers, with six informants being in their 50s, age groups 40-49 and 60-69 each having four informants, and age groups of 20-29 and 70-79 each having two and three informants respectively. Out of all my informants four (all women) were laypersons not employed by Seichō no Ie or held higher positions in its women's association, the remaining informants were employed in the movement's administration. Since my main questions was related to the greening of Seichō no Ie and adherents' response to this, no other aspects on their background or makeup of Seichō no Ie's membership was explored.

During my research I visited several of Seichō no Ie's *kyōkabu* (教化部), or local offices in Kyoto, Tokyo and Ibaraki. The term *kyōkabu* carries the connotation of an 'educating' or 'enlightening' facility, something which is echoed in Seichō no Ie's raison d'être as a "Humanity Enlightenment Movement" (*jinrui kōmyō undo* 人類光明運動) (Davies 1970, 126, Staemmler 2011b, 155). These facilities function as local offices; meeting halls and places of worship for Seichō no Ie adherents and can be found throughout Japan. In addition I also visited their international headquarters, former site of their international headquarters and the Additional Main Temple in Uji, with the intention of interviewing laypeople, office workers and ordained ministers of Seichō no Ie. Several opportunities to observe their activities also presented themselves. With my former studies being focused on Japanese language and culture, I had formerly been in these areas during my studies and gained a decent command of the Japanese language and understanding of its culture, allowing me to conduct interviews and speak to the people I met. Research in a foreign language, however, requires a command of the language that exceeded my conversational Japanese abilities at times, presenting a challenge. To ensure minimal information loss, the interviews were recorded, allowing me to better focus on the interview and being more of a conversationalist, as Berry (2002, 679) suggests is central for any decent interviewer. Though this also presented challenges with finding a balance between asking questions, guiding the conversation, and simply listening. This measure proved invaluable in making up for lacking language abilities, as it also gave me the benefit of going through interviews later in detail. In addition, most informants were very friendly and helpful in times of confusion.

As the goal of the research was to gain an increased understanding of Seichō no Ie's values in regards to nature and the environment, I chose to proceed with qualitative interviews as the main method for data collection. Interviews as method is most useful for finding information that is scarce or difficult to come by through other means (Richards 1996, 200), as was the case in my research. The method is also better suited to obtain an understanding of an atmosphere, context or feeling, not as easily represented through written sources and unobservable in quantitative methods (ibid.). Aberbach and Rockman (2002, 673) similarly praise the interview's ability to better allow one to glean an informant's thoughts, what they have done or are planning to do, as is partially the goal of this thesis. The interview followed a more open ended and semi structured approach, with an interview guide used as an aide-memoir to cover certain topics, allowing the informant to define and decide what was relevant as they are in possession of specialized knowledge (Kezar 2003, 397). It is in this sense, that the informants held knowledge superior to mine, that I define my informants as elite informants. As Dexter (2006, 19) explains:

> In elite interviewing… the investigator is willing, and often eager to let the interviewee teach him what the problem, the question, the situation, is – to the limits, of course, of the interviewers ability to perceive relationships to his basic problems, whatever these may be.

This form of interviewing allowed me to better learn the motives behind Seichō no Ie's environmental efforts and the thoughts and feelings behind them from the informant's perspective. With the informants being given certain freedoms, the most prominent pitfall of interviews, the margin of error in their subjective account of a topic or situation, needs to be taken into consideration. Some of this may be remedied by referring to other sources to confirm or disprove facts. The open ended format also becomes a challenge as they can also complicate later analysis as shown by Aberbach and Rockman (2002, 674), even though they can better 'measure' beliefs and values. As a result, I acknowledge these points and have attempted to analyse the collected data in light of this.

When researching a topic related to religion, the question of who can reliably relate to and present a religion's workings naturally arises. In the words of Singh (1991, 3): "Primarily, religion is an area which is not easily accessible to the outsider, foreigner or non-participant. The inner meaning of religion unfolds only through participation; by

following the prescribed path and discipline." Although Singh's emphasis on an "inner meaning", embedded in a point of view with understanding restricted to religious practitioners, ignores the physical and observable manifestations of religion, it raises a valid point. With me being an unaffiliated researcher, my exploration into Seichō no Ie comes from the perspective of an outsider, making it challenging to fully comprehend their values or view of the environment. Through my fieldwork, I therefore attempt to pay justice to the emic narratives of my informants and allow their voices to be heard (Knott 2010, 261-262), providing further rationale for my choice of method, while also acknowledging my limitations as an observer.

As an outsider I also realize the need for reflexivity, as one brings one's own 'cultural baggage' into research, and an understanding of how this may influence data (Davies 2008, 5). As Flood (1999, 143) puts it:

> The inquiry into the nature of religion or quasi-religious propensities within culture, becomes a dialogical enterprise in which the inquirer is situated within a particular context or narrative tradition, and whose research into narrative traditions, that become the objects of investigation, must be apprehended in a much richer and multi-faceted way.

With both the observer and observed situated in each their own cultural context, one enters a critical conversation between the two, where the researcher and researched engage in 'co-constructing' the world (Davies 2008, 8). Being a student at the Centre for Development and Environment, I am naturally engaged in questions regarding the environment and have a great interest in the subject. In addition, my former experiences with Japan and the seemingly nature inclined Shinto tradition explain my interest in the topic of religion in the Japanese context and its relationship with nature. This thesis then has formed as a result of an amalgam of interests, with my personal desire to contribute towards environmental sustainability and a desire to explore the unknown (to me) and alluring aspects found in the mysticism of religion. The case of Seichō no Ie presented an apt opportunity to combine these two research interests and satisfy an underlying curiosity about the bonds between nature and religion. This allowed me to go beyond the veneer of Seichō no Ie's recent construction projects and gain a deeper understanding of their ecological motives. These two interests have grown in a 'Western' academic context however, placing me as a researcher in a different narrative tradition than those I research. This requires an awareness of my role in order to avoid

the pitfalls as expounded heavily on by Said (1994) in his *Orientalism,* so as not to reproduce an East-West binary. The dialogue between the researcher and research subject, however, though presenting two different (perhaps even vastly different) points of view, allows both sides to still constructively converse, and, even though there can be no ethical or value neutrality between the two, Flood (1999, 148-150) argues this dialogue can be conducted without compromising explanation or understanding. So even though my research attempts to describe an inter-subjective account of Seichō no Ie's environmental activities through the eyes of my informants as well as my own, I have attempted do so critically from of my position as a researcher situated in his own cultural context.

In addition to the interviews, other sources have also proven to be valuable for data collection. A common trait for many a Japanese new religious movement is using publications as a form of proselytization, meaning there is an abundance of written materials (Seichō no Ie originally started out as a publishing enterprise) (Matsunaga 2000, 36-37). For Seichō no Ie this is especially true and I was able to acquire several books, monthly magazines and pamphlets published by the group, a valuable source on Seichō no Ie and their environmental efforts. Most new religious movements have an internet presence which can be a great source for information on their activities. Seichō no Ie, having an international presence, has several sites, in both English and Portuguese, in addition to its Japanese sites. But in my case, the Japanese webpages contained the most detailed information and proved to be the most valuable throughout my research. Though not academic sources, these primary sources can serve as a basis for further academic discussion and analysis.

The above mentioned methods for data collection allowed me to gather large amounts of data for analysis in a relatively short time frame. The benefit of applying different methods and sources in my research has been the triangulation of results, improving the reliability of the data, and allowing for a broader analysis of Seichō no Ie's efforts in communicating sustainability and their ideas on solutions to the climate crisis.

1.3 On the Methodology of Analysis

Upon completion of fieldwork, I transcribed the interviews. Later I analysed and loosely coded the data through a mixed methods approach according to the methods of

Goffman's (1986) frame analysis and narrative analysis as inspired by Bruner (1990) and his work *Acts of Meaning*, with the addition of the helpful introductory work of Riessman (2008). These two methods of frame and narrative analysis were chosen to enrich the thesis and answer how Seichō no Ie frames the environmental crisis, and how individual adherents create meaning from their religion's green turn respectively.

On the subject of narrative, and echoing Bruner (1990, 79-80) in his seminal work, Andrews et al. (2007, 100) state:

> …our stories are not and can never be wholly personal. Rather, we perceive reality in terms of stories, and ultimately how we construct, interpret, digest and recount for others our own experiences bears a strong relationship to the story-lines that are already 'out there'.

In the case of my thesis, the story-line 'out there', is the greening of Seichō no Ie. Narrative represents our inherent ability to organize our experiences in narrative form, with our cultural contexts providing us with 'tool kits' for interpreting and crafting our narratives, what Bruner (1990, 137) terms as 'folk psychology'. A deeper look at how individuals use narrative comes of use as it:

> …is also a way of generating knowledge that disrupts old certainties and allows us to glimpse something of the complexities of human lives, selves and endeavours. It illuminates not only individual lives but also broader social processes" (Andrews 2007, 103).

In contrast to the larger frames found through Goffman's analysis, narrative analysis allow us to understand stories (or narratives) on an individual level, stories that among its many uses can also inspire and mobilize selves and others into action for progressive change, something which is of great need for a sustainable transition (Riessman 2008, 9). The narratives found in my interviews allowed a glimpse of the endeavours of Seichō no Ie's members and provided knowledge on how and why Seichō no Ie was changing in the face of climate change. Through analysis I coded themes and smaller stories (or narratives) that appeared in my informant's narrative, first noting what was explicitly stated, then considering latent meanings. This allowed me to combine them and create a larger narrative on Seichō no Ie's greening and position in a global environmental debate from my informant's point of view. Through narrative analysis one obtains a richer perspective from the multi-layered meanings of narratives, be they written texts or spoken stories. However, Riessman (ibid., 8) also warns of narrative's

uses to meet end goals, and therefore how narratives can also mislead, requiring a critical view on my part.

According to Goffman (1986, 21):

> When the individual in our Western society recognizes a particular event, he tends, whatever else he does, to imply in this response (and in effect employ) one or more frameworks or schemata of interpretation of a kind that can be called primary. I say primary because application of such a framework or perspective is seen by those who apply it as not depending on or harking back to some prior or "original" interpretation; indeed a primary framework is one that is seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful.

As the purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of Seichō no Ie's ecological attitudes and ideas of human-nature relationships, discovering such primary frameworks becomes essential as "[t]aken all together, the primary frameworks of a particular social group constitute a central element of its culture" (Goffman 1986, 27). By looking at the each of the frameworks of my informants, then combining them into a "framework of frameworks" one is able to gain a better understanding of Seichō no Ie's social agenda pertaining to the environmental crisis and humanity's past and future role in it. Such a "framework of frameworks", or in this case Seichō no Ie's 'cognitive framework', is something Goffman (ibid.) equates with a group's "belief system" or "its 'cosmology'". This required me to find forms of emphasis and patterns across interviews. The 'frames' were coded accordingly finding themes, stories, sources of conflict, and possible solutions regarding the environmental crisis and the role of Seichō no Ie. This allowed me to re-construct the worldview, or the 'cognitive framework' of Seichō no Ie, that the 'frames' in the individual interviews of Seichō no Ie adherents enforced (Bruner 1990, 56).

A blend of frame and narrative analysis provide a multifaceted perspective of my informants and Seichō no Ie , and work in tandem to shed light on the broader environmental agenda of Seichō no Ie. It also presents how these changes are perceived and given meaning by Seichō no Ie adherents. According to Bruner (1990, 137) this meaning is equated to "culturally shaped notions in terms of which people organize their views of themselves, of others and of the world in which they live". This is the

lens through which I aim to understand Seichō no Ie's place in the broader debate of greening religions.

1.4 Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The next chapter provides necessary background information on the study of religions. I begin with providing explanations for concepts used throughout the thesis and follow with a brief history of new religious movements in Japan and its different phases to paint a vivid backdrop for the new religious movement that is the focus of this study. I then provide a history and profile of Seichō no Ie as different sources provide only a fragmented view, thus providing an in-depth account of Seichō no Ie for the benefit of both reader and the author. In Chapter 3, I draw on the larger debate surrounding religion and the environment, presenting the origins of the debate and issues that have risen in its wake. The results of the discussion are then presented, highlighting the ways in which religion can inspire and foster an ecological view. The above is then scaled down to the context of Japan before presenting relevant critique of seeking solutions in Eastern religious tradition that is applicable to my study. Chapter 4 seeks to answer the first of the three research questions, namely how Seichō no Ie is concretely tackling the issue of environmental degradation and presents their efforts, as observed during fieldwork at different Seichō no Ie locations along with additional sources. In Chapter 5, I look at my interviews and the meanings drawn from the narratives of my informants to understand what they see as the rationale for the new environmental outlook adopted by Seichō no Ie in recent years. Finally, I reconstruct Seichō no Ie's cognitive framework on the basis of interviews and sources collected during fieldwork, introducing how Seichō no Ie on a whole understands and frames the eco-crisis of our age, before I present my concluding thoughts and possible future avenues of research in Chapter 6.

2 Background: Japanese New Religions and Seichō no Ie

As was implied in the introduction to this thesis, there has been a perceptible 'greening' of Seichō no Ie. It was founded in 1930 and therefore has a considerably long history for a new religious movement. However, only a limited amount of academic work has been conducted on Seichō no Ie. A comprehensive introduction to the movement and the historical developments of new religious movements in Japan thus becomes necessary for my own, as well as any reader's further understanding of Seichō no Ie and its recent greening. This chapter provides such an introduction as well as shedding some light on terminology related to the study of Japanese new religious movements and their history. I present that religious histories have gone through reinterpretations, revisions and changes, and that these may emerge in response to contemporary issues, such as environmental ones as is the case in my study.

2.1 Conceptual Apparatus

Before delving into the historical developments of new religions in Japan, it is necessary to tackle issues regarding the term 'new religions.' Though the term 'religion' itself is worthy of a discussion in its own right, it is here used in reference to groups that themselves identify as such, and are described as such in common parlance, thus avoiding the quagmire of lengthy academic debates the term usually instigates. The Japanese terms for new religions are *shinkō shūkyō* (新興宗教) and *shin shūkyō* (新宗教), with *shūkyō* (宗教) being the term for religion (or religions as Japanese makes no difference between singular and plural). The use of *shin shūkyō* when referring to new religions is the norm in scholarship on the subject (Astley 2006, 92-93). In broad terms, Staemmler and Dehn (2011, 1) define new religions in Japan as religious organizations that have arisen since the mid-nineteenth century and who share several common characteristics: a charismatic founder; a close-knit community surrounding a central leadership in which members and most leaders are lay people; simple and syncretistic teachings often including millenarian elements; a focus on this world; and close links between teachings and actions. It is in this sense the term 'new religions' is used to describe the general phenomenon while 'new religious movements,' as preferred by

most scholars, is used to denote a more specific group or groups in order to avoid the semantic issues related to a term such as 'religion.'

The choice of using 'new religious movements,' as opposed to 'cults' or 'sects,' requires further clarification. When hearing the term 'cult,' one associates the term with questionable, if not outright dangerous, groups under allegations of brainwashing or outright harmful behaviour. Japan has first-hand experience with such fringe groups through the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack in 1995 perpetrated by the notorious new religious group Aum Shinrikyō. With the negative and pejorative connotations attached to 'cults' in both mass media and popular literature that arose in the aftermath, academic circles avoid the term, preferring something more neutral such as 'new religion', giving the subject of new religious movements a fair and scholarly treatment as is expected from an academic perspective (Staemmler and Dehn 2011, 3).

My avoidance of the term 'sect' also stems from somewhat similar reasons. Werblowsky (1980, 156) reminds us that "practically all the great religions began as quaint sects", but the term has become problematic. I avoid the term 'sect' because doing so has become a widespread convention in scholarly discourse on new religions according to Staemmler and Dehn (2011, 3) (though used liberally when it comes to Buddhist denominations and branches). The reason for this is that 'sect' implies that a new religious movement is sub-ordered as a branch under the auspices of another "mother religion". Although new religious movements may contain elements of more established religions, the term 'sect' fails to analyse the movement in question as independent (ibid.) Choosing to avoid the use of 'sect' in this manner elicits an understanding of new religious movements as single religious phenomena, worthy of research in their own right, which accurately reflects the reality of such movements and my study of Seichō no Ie.

2.2 New Religions in Japan: Historical Contexts

As mentioned in Staemmler and Dehn's definition, it is largely agreed that the nascence of Japanese new religions occurred somewhere around the mid nineteenth century. On this matter there are several opinions and differing periods of demarcation in the years that follow. A deeper understanding of these periods becomes necessary as the socio-cultural climate of the time of founding, or at times of great social development or

change, tell a great deal of the religious movement in question. One of the earliest efforts to chart out these formative periods was conducted by McFarland (1967, 54), who categorized new religious activity in the following periods: the decline of the Tokugawa shogunate[5] during the first half of the nineteenth century until the years around the tumultuous Meiji restoration of 1868; the following period leading up to the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905); the period from the war until the mid-1920s; the next period leading up to World War II; with the final "rush hour of the gods," to put it in McFarland's terms, set during the post war period.

McFarland's chronology traces the developments of new religions at several critical stages in Japanese history. From around the early nineteenth century until the declining years of the Tokugawa shogunate many a peasant sought alternatives to a life in a highly hierarchical and socially static society, with new religious movements serving as outlets for their dissatisfaction with the then current status quo and as a way of circumventing travel bans (McFarland 1967, 54-60, Cooper, Ogata, and Eades 2008, 108,111). Similarly, the changes imposed on the common citizen through the following Meiji restoration saw a new social system forced upon increasingly marginalized rural peasants (McFarland 1967, 46-47). These groups sought succour in new religious movements as the turmoil of modernization and the pursuit of forming a nation state was not as prosperous or beneficial for much of Japan's citizenry (ibid.). The growth of new religions during this period saw an immense boost, as they held promises of social change and betterment of life on earth, something that also led to the government's growing scepticism towards new religions as they criticized the state and blamed it for the injustice and social maladies of the time (McClain 2002, 269).

The Meiji restoration, in addition, encountered other challenges in the efforts of creating a modern nation state. One such issue was inspiring loyalty towards the nation and gathering the people under a common banner of revering the emperor Meiji himself as divine descendent of the sun goddess Amaterasu, which also inspired the increased interference of the state in Shinto affairs (Hardacre 2017, 355-402). This led to the dissolution of a long-standing syncretic relationship with Buddhism, and the preeminent position of Shinto at the expense and subordination of other religious traditions, especially newer movements (ibid., 368-371). Furthermore, the Japanese government

[5] The last feudal military government of Japan which existed from 1603-1868 (McClain 2002, 5-47)

realized its treatment of Christianity gained little favour from the West, a treatment that needed to be amended in their pursuit for international recognition. These two efforts resulted in the Meiji cabinet creating a policy based on the division between 'national faith' (Shinto) and 'religion' which, included in the 1889 constitution, granted religious freedom, though within limits, to all Japanese subjects (McFarland 1967, 51-52). This distinction, McFarland posits, is the source of the Japanese ambiguity regarding the religious status of Shinto and it being considered more as a tradition lying outside the realm of religions. What is relevant to our discussion here, however, is that this categorization saw religions as either state sanctioned official religions, or not. It was the latter category that applied to many new religious movements of the time, eventually leading to their persecution if they did not follow national polity. State sanctioned religions included Buddhism, Christianity, and thirteen popular religious movements designated collectively as Sectarian Shinto, founded mostly by the remnants of proselytizers of state ideology who, though distinct from Shinto shrines, bore resemblances in liturgy and rites[6].

Entering the twentieth century, Japan's continued urbanization and the effects of the Russo-Japanese War led to a period of increasing disparity between the rural and urban populations not only politically and economically, but also spiritually. These societal changes led to alienated groups and individuals being drawn to new religious movements rather than to the formalized religions, who so far had failed to meet their needs (McFarland 1967, 60-62, McClain 2002, 388). Other contributing factors were a combination of increased interest in political and social matters among the general population, the powerlessness to exert any influence under stifling laws, and growth of right-wing ideologies and militarism (Staemmler 2011a, 18). As before, new religious movements served as outlets for frustrations caused by a stifling society, and the period saw an immense growth and strengthening of new religious movements. One of the more prominent 'booming' new religious movements during this time was Ōmoto (大本), a new religious movement with dogmatic and ritualistic elements incorporated from Shinto. It was originally founded in 1892 by Deguchi Nao who, through spirit possession and without any formal schooling, managed to produce texts and millenarian prophecies while in trances at the age of fifty-five (Stalker 2008, 35-38).

[6] See Hardacre (2017, 376-387) for details on early Meiji era Shinto sects and the position of other religions in relation to the Great Promulgation Campaign.

The Shinto-derived movement drew little interest and few followers until the illustrious Deguchi Onisaburō (married to Nao's daughter) joined the ranks, using his entrepreneurial and innovative spirit to tap into the spiritual milieu of the period (Stalker 2008). The application of print and other new forms of media in an increasingly literate society in combination with Deguchi Onisaburō's creative panache drew droves of followers to the movement in the early twentieth century.

Large scale growth, inflammatory doctrine, acts of spirit possession and apocalyptic prophecies of world renewal, however, soon drew the authorities' attention. In 1900 the enactment of the Peace Police law enabled police to disband political meetings and associations and barred, among others, religious specialists from political activities (Staemmler 2011a, 25-27). Though formerly lax in the enforcement of the law, the state became ever more concerned with larger associations potentially disrupting peace and not following official orthodoxy. In such a climate and on the basis of Ōmoto's growing power, political involvement and other transgressions, the police raided Ōmoto headquarters in 1921 on accusations of lèse majesty and arrested its leaders in an event known as the first Ōmoto incident (Stalker 2008, 97-99). In later years Ōmoto was to again incur the wrath of the state by becoming more politically engaged, joining forces with far-right radicals and calling for drastic political and spiritual reforms, culminating in a second crack down by the state (Stalker 2008, 175-182). Under accusations of sedition and drawn out legal processes, Ōmoto, along with all its affiliated organizations, was severely crippled, leaving Ōmoto in a position from which the new religious movement never truly recovered (ibid. , 183-187). However, Ōmoto has left a legacy in the form of several new religious movements that, if not directly, have to a certain extent been influenced by or at least drawn inspiration from the movement, which we will see in the next section is the case for Seichō no Ie.

As was the case with Ōmoto, the growth of other new religious movements was increasingly restricted in the 1920s and the ensuing 1930s through a progressively fascistic state's harsh crack down on non-official new religious movements, only sparing those that complied with governmental guidelines and assisting in spreading their directives and state ideology (McFarland 1967, 63-64, Hardacre 1986, 10). As the Home Ministry continued their efforts to unify the nation under the head of a sacrosanct emperor, and gathering the citizens behind the war effort, the "eradication of evil cults"

became a necessity as new religious movements, though not necessarily antagonistic towards the emperor, could threaten his divine position as the imperial figurehead, leading to their persecution (McClain 2002, 469). Those who did conform to 'the Imperial Way' however, by tempering their goals and registering as sects or branches of officially recognized religions, flourished as they avoided persecution and were permitted to erect facilities and continue the publishing of materials (McFarland 1967, 64, McClain 2002, 469, Staemmler 2011a, 18). Further incentive to register as sects was given to religious organizations through the Religious Organizations law of 1940, which enabled the state to dissolve any religious group that did not comply with national polity (Stalker 2008, 185). The nationalistic zeal that was at its peak in the years leading up to the war and restrictive measures enforced on religions by the state, left many new religious movements in a precarious position, forcing them to either lay low and obey state directives or be destroyed. It was in such a context that Seichō no Ie emerged, surely contributing towards its complicated war-time history. The conclusion of World War II, left a moral and religious vacuum, paving the way for unprecedented religious freedom through new legislation and a surge in numbers for new religions as the immediate post-war years saw many being in an impoverished state (McFarland 1967, 65-67, Staemmler 2011a, 19). The conclusion of World War II inaugurated a new wave of spiritual interest leading to growth among new and old religious movements alike, often with existing groups needing to change and adapt to a new spiritual and religious landscape.

McFarland's analysis is somewhat outmoded because it does not go much further than the immediate post-war years. This excludes much of the later developments in modern Japanese history. Therefore, revision of his classification was necessary. Hardacre (1986, 4) divides three new religious booms into the periods of the early until late nineteenth century, the time surrounding the 1920s and the post-war period. This is an ordering with which Reader (1991, 195) agrees and offers the social upheavals of those times as explanations for these 'booms'. However, Reader (ibid), as well as Kisala (1999, 3), add a fourth wave occurring around the years of Japan's economic miracle in the 1970s-1980s where a range of new religions emerged, classifying themselves as 'new new religions' to differentiate themselves from the prior generations (Werblowsky 1980, 162, Staemmler 2011a, 21). These have come forth in a technologically modern and increasingly globalized society characterized by anti-modern and 'Japanocentric'

sentiments, reflecting the social unease of the age due to the oil shock and people seeking greater meaning beyond material and economic wealth (Reader 1991, 195). This era came to an abrupt halt with the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway perpetrated by Aum Shinrikyō in 1995, initiating the current and final period of scepticism and negative views of new religious leaders who have had to deal with several legal changes for religions in Japan (Matsunaga 2000, 36-37, Baffelli and Staemmler 2011, 292-293).

From this historical overview, one can differentiate between five time periods, or waves, that represent different socio-cultural contexts for new religious movements throughout Japanese history:

1. The transition between the Tokugawa and Meiji governments in the latter part of the nineteenth century until the early twentieth century
2. The time around the 1920s and 1930s
3. The immediate post war period including the 1950s and 1960s
4. The post-oil-shock period in the 1970s and 1980s
5. The current period following the 1995 Aum-incident

These waves, each with their great social changes and upheavals, have shaped new religious movements and their development, forcing some to adapt or perish, something the new religious movement of this thesis perfectly exemplifies. Arising during the second wave, Seichō no Ie remained a relatively small new religious movement and went under the radar as it complied with state ideology. The history of Seichō no Ie presents an interesting case of a highly adaptive, almost chameleon-like new religious movement, something worth considering with its latest environmental turn. It is this flexibility, along with a detailed description of Seichō no Ie's evolution, I shall tackle next.

2.3 What is Seichō no Ie?

Seichō no Ie is officially registered as a religious organization and its members perceive it as a human enlightenment movement. While Staemmler (2011b, 141) placed the membership of Seichō no Ie at 787,222 in 2007 based on her sources, according to Seichō no Ie's own website, the religious movement has a membership of 521,100 adherents within Japan as of 2014. The survey from 2017 by the Agency of Cultural Affairs, however, states that Seichō no Ie has 459,531 members within Japan, and 13,824 instructors, with the majority of these (10,698) being women[7] (Bunkachō 2017, 87). These numbers are problematic for several reasons. Statistics relating to religious membership in Japan are notoriously known for their arbitrariness as this information is shared only on a voluntary basis and criteria for registering membership vary greatly between religious groups (Staemmler and Dehn 2011, 5-6). The above numbers are therefore often exaggerated. There are also problems of multiple affiliations to more than one religion and legal benefits such as tax exemptions for religious groups that may further artificially increase membership numbers (Astley 2006, 96-98). Although these numbers are inaccurate, they still give a sense of the size and reflect the waning membership of Seichō no Ie, a problem plaguing many other new religious movements as well.

One of the movement's main tenets is that 'man as a child of God' and its members aim to spread this idea and how one should live life accordingly and feel grateful and responsible to our environment. Their regard for the environment had not extended much beyond local community initiatives to clean up trash on organized walks and using reusable shopping bags and chopsticks, shirking their disposable kinds (Staemmler 2011b, 155). In recent years however, as was previously alluded to, Seichō no Ie has moved beyond these relatively simple measures and attempted to tackle the issues of a society based on excess and unsustainable practices on a greater scale. In the following I present a thorough examination Seichō no Ie's past, chartering their developments from their founding in 1930 until our current times.

2.3.1 Origins of Seichō no Ie

[7] Hardacre (1986, 193) states that "women frequently find in the new religions an extremely satisfying avenue of prestige and an outlet for talent and energy. Since there are fewer pollution restrictions to limit their participation than in established religions, women participate in great numbers and with remarkable energy" using this as a possible explanation for high female membership.

The life of Seichō no Ie's founder Taniguchi Masaharu (1893-1985), along with those of his fellow new religious founders, share a common theme: Their lives are strikingly similar to hagiographies of famous Japanese religious figures, such as Kūkai and En no Gyōja, who respectively imported esoteric Buddhism and created the tradition of mountain ascetics (Stalker 2008, 21-22). Such illustrious figures, who all went through trials and tribulations before their religious awakening and founding of their respective traditions, are common in the new religions of Japan. As Davis has noted (1992, 306, fn 27), "part of the moral legitimation of leadership in Japan is the idea that the founder of an institution suffered in order to bring it into existence." This is but one of several common traits shared between Japanese new religious movements and companies which Matsunaga (2000) elucidates in her work. These stories of suffering and perseverance grant the founders legitimacy as founder and source of wisdom of the organization in question. The tales surrounding Taniguchi Masaharu's life are similarly dramatic, miraculous and filled with strife before he became founder of Seichō no Ie.

Born in a hamlet near Kobe, the fledgling founder had an auspicious childhood before eventually entering the literature department of Waseda University to pursue his interest in English literature against his family's wishes (McFarland 1967, 148, Davies 1970, 11-17). His academic career was cut short however, as a brief affair with a girl resulted in his aunt, on whose graces he received an allowance for tuition, ended her financial support. This was not the last incident in Taniguchi's life with the fairer sex, as only a few years after prematurely ending his academic career, he was yet again embroiled simultaneously in affairs with two women, one of them giving him a venereal disease, and with him possibly passing it on to the other. This experience, led to an interest in alternate modes of healing and spiritualism, which was also in vogue early in the 20th century (McFarland 1967, 149, Stalker 2008, 77-89, Staemmler 2011b, 142). Taniguchi was in part also driven by a wish for finding ways of healing the possibly infected girl without her knowing. These interests eventually led the young Taniguchi to the new religion Ōmoto in 1917, which he entered to perhaps atone for his past misdemeanours (McFarland 1967, 149, Staemmler 2011b, 142). His talent for literature allowed him to swiftly rise within the new religious movement's ranks, and he soon became a vital part of its staff employed in Ōmoto's publishing section.

Apart from his personal interest in spiritualism, it seems it was in Ōmoto Taniguchi had his first experience with new religions. From the onset of his affiliation with Ōmoto and employment in its publishing section, Taniguchi seemed sceptical towards the movement's practices, especially its common practice of spirit possession (Stalker 2008, 95). However, through a personal revelatory experience written by him and recounted in Ōmoto's own publications, he found himself to be possessed by a fox spirit, as witnessed during one of these rituals often performed in Ōmoto. Taniguchi believed this explained both his strenuous relationship to his father (who had trapped and killed the fox whose spirit was possessing him) and his previous liaisons (one of which was possessed by the spirit's mate), leading him to become qualified to perform rites of spirit possession himself (ibid.). The large scale acts of spirit possession, among other factors, drew the authorities' attention and as a result instigated the first Ōmoto incident. To assuage the negative connotations of spirit possession, the Ōmoto practice was altered to focus more on meditation and prayer recitation. It was this from of the practice that later became the foundation for many healing and meditative techniques employed by succeeding new religious movements. This includes Seichō no Ie, where the practice was adapted to become a form of prayerful meditation termed *shinsōkan* (神想観) (McFarland 1967, 161, Stalker 2008, 103).

It would appear that Taniguchi's period within Ōmoto contributed towards the formation of his Seichō no Ie as this allowed him to both work in publishing, using it as an outlet for his own thoughts, and dabbling with spiritual matters. Shortly after the first Ōmoto incident in 1921, Taniguchi and his wife, whom he had met within Ōmoto, withdrew from the movement. Whether this was to avoid the state persecution of heterodox religion which Ōmoto incurred at the time, or due to the disillusionment of unfulfilled Ōmoto prophecies and disagreements with its practices, remains uncertain (McFarland 1967, 150, Staemmler 2011b, 142).

The following years saw a period of further struggles, with Taniguchi and his wife moving to Tokyo. Here, he, his wife and daughter experienced several health related issues. They moved to relatives in Kobe in the aftermath of the Great Kantō Earthquake (McFarland 1967, 150-151, Staemmler 2011b, 142-143). Taniguchi spent this period further exploring spiritualism, deepening his interest in the New Thought movement and writing works that would later become his magnum opus, *The Truth of Life* (生命の

実相 *Seimei no Jissō*), much to the dismay of his financially challenged family (Davies 1970, 18-20, 32, Staemmler 2011b, 143). His literary efforts soon paid off, however, as sales of his essay went surprisingly well, inspiring him further (along with some divine intervention according to Taniguchi himself (Davies 1970, 23,30)) to publish his own magazine. Using funds from a translation job (which appeared in an equally "miraculous" manner), Taniguchi published the first issue of the magazine *Seichō no Ie* in 1930, which was later considered to be the founding of the movement (McFarland 1967, 151-152, Stalker 2008, 103). Seichō no Ie thus began as a publishing enterprise with the movement slowly growing in subsequent years through an increasing number of publications and lectures. Subscribers to the magazine began to congregate to discuss Taniguchi's writings and shared tales of miraculous healings happening simply by reading his texts, which drew more adherents (Davies 1970, 30, 34, Staemmler 2011b, 143-144). On another note, McFarland (1967, 151) questions the true motivation for Taniguchi's efforts and suggests that he simply wished to provide a marketable product fitting for the times, similar to the way in which Stalker (2008) characterizes Ōmoto's Deguchi Onisaburō as a "charismatic entrepreneur": aptly using new forms of media to propagate to a society interested in and inclined towards spiritualism. In the case of Seichō no Ie, the recipe for success was its propagation through print media in a society with improved literacy, and writing on subjects of spirituality that were of great interest in the period and highly compatible with the social changes of the time. The motivations behind the beginning of Seichō no Ie are varied. McFarland's hypothesis raises questions about Taniguchi's motivations. But Taniguchi's inspiration by a divine truth in combination with an opportune business venture, presents an adaptability that would prove to be necessary for the religious movement's survival in subsequent years.

2.3.2 Growing Nationalism

As previously mentioned, the increasingly fascistic state made the lives of heterodox religious movements, especially new ones, all the more difficult from the 1920s and onwards. The increasing state interference in the religious sphere resulted in a bend or break response from new religious movements, with only those that somehow fell in line with nationalistic and militaristic ideology being able to prosper (McClain 2002, 469-470, McFarland 1967, 152). Under the Law of Religious Organizations (enacted in 1940 (Staemmler 2011a, 28)) the state:

> …sought not only to expand government control over religious organizations but also to supervise even more strictly actions that could be construed as interfering with peace, order and national goals. Also, because the government wanted legally recognized religious organizations to mobilize spiritual support for its aims, it established subsidies to provide such organizations with a solid financial basis. (Nakano 1996, 116)

Joining the state in its efforts thus became more appealing, even beneficial to some, reminding us that although the state exerted power against religious minorities, this implies that more faceted and collaborative relationships existed between new religions and state. In the case of Seichō no Ie, McFarland (1967, 153) terms their development from their founding and onwards as a "chronicle of expediency": they organized themselves as a capitalist enterprise, easily allowing them to criticize other religious movements, and later registered as an educational or enlightenment organization (教化団体 *kyōka dantai*), something McFarland interprets as a signal of Seichō no Ie's willingness to cooperate with the state in "edifying the nation". Finally, in 1941, Seichō no Ie had become a fully-fledged religious organization that fell under the auspices of the Minister of Education, initiating a phase of collaboration between the state and Seichō no Ie. The relationship with the state benefited the movement financially and allowed them to continue their propagation free of restrictions (McFarland 1967, 154, Matsunaga 2000, 48). This interlude of Seichō no Ie in cooperation with the state marked the beginnings of an increasingly nationalistic Seichō no Ie. Taniguchi made great strides with militarists, even exceeding them in fervour at certain points according to McFarland (1967, 154-156). With state backing Seichō no Ie's activities were successful among small to medium-sized factories in increasing efficiency and decreasing anti-war sentiments, through their activities, publications and successfully concerted slogan campaigns for the fighting soldiers of imperial Japan. The culmination of World War II, however, would see a changed Seichō no Ie, moving in the opposite direction away from militaristic opinions and working together with Occupation forces to assist in the democratization of Japan.

Great care was taken in post-war years to distance the religious movement from its former militaristic sentiments, and Taniguchi was rather successful in doing so, claiming that the actions of Seichō no Ie simply reflected their role as dutiful citizens of imperial Japan, wishing only to help their nation through trying times and downplayed

their militaristic undertones. This is in stark contrast when compared to the following statement made by Taniguchi himself regarding Japan's war efforts:

> If the whole of the Japanese nation had become members of Seichō no Ie at an early date and had been praying for victory, then I think Japan would have won the war. I do not say this without proof. The proof is that, at the end of the war, all of the military ships which had not been damaged had members of Seicho no Ie on board. (Taniguchi Masaharu, 1958, 154, quoted in McFarland (1967, 155).

Unable to completely distance themselves from their nationalistic character, Seichō no Ie's popularity declined with their negative image immediately after the war, and several leaders were purged from their positions by Occupation authorities. These events resulted in the creation of a religious body separate from its publishing enterprise in accordance to new legislation (ibid., 156). Seichō no Ie kept a low profile during the Occupation, cooperating with occupation forces, but certain aspects from its pre-war nationalistic zeal would have a comeback after the end of the occupation in 1952.

The earlier experience with state interference and its former nationalistic zeal never truly disappeared from the ranks of Seichō no Ie, with the movement becoming involved in conservative national politics between 1945 and 1983 (Staemmler 2011b, 144). This became even more apparent as the occupation ended in 1952, when Seichō no Ie again adapted quickly to the changing societal climate, and aligned themselves with growing reactionary causes and sentiments in the post occupation vacuum (McFarland 1967, 156-157). The first manoeuvre involved rebranding Seichō no Ie as a non- or supra-religious organization, withdrawing from the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan (新宗連 *Shinshūren*) on the grounds of being a "truth movement" rather than a religion, not only teaching "the truth common to every sect and every religion", but also to cast a wider net for followers making themselves more accessible even to those not interested in religious matters (ibid.). Several ultra-conservative causes were adopted by Seichō no Ie as well, including educational reform to render Japan during the war in a more positive light so as to inspire love of nation rather than shame, revision of the post-war constitution of Japan, revival of the holiday of the mythical founding of Japan based on the Japanese classics, and increased use of the national flag and anthem (ibid., 166). An interesting point raised by McFarland (1967, 169-171) during his fieldwork, however, was that even though such acts as the

display of the national flag or singing of the national anthem, seemed to inspire a nationalism eerily reminiscent to the one leading up to World War II, the nationalism was not interpreted by Seichō no Ie members as reverting back to a rampant militarism. Rather the goal was to learn to love one's own greater community and country, and thus eventually foster love for the larger world-community.

Their conservative inclinations also led to a connection with Nippon Kaigi (日本会議 or Japan Conference), today a right-wing umbrella organization with ties to several influential members, including the current Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō (Mizohata 2016). Mizohata shows how several key figures within Nippon Kaigi defected from Seichō no Ie during their more political days when its student union and political wing were active in anti-communism and pro-emperor veneration causes. Many of these early Nippon Kaigi members were active in Seichō no Ie's student union, and later moved on to found their own right-wing movements, merging with likeminded idealists and groups, before finally morphing into the modern iteration Nippon Kaigi in 1997 (ibid., 8, Brasor 2016). However, the connection between Seichō no Ie and Nippon Kaigi lasted only briefly, as Seichō no Ie fully withdrew from politics in 1983 with the dissolution of its student union and political wing, and distanced themselves from earlier anti-leftist sentiments. These connections were until recently unknown. However, the release of the book *Nippon Kaigi no Kenkyū* (日本会議の研究) by Sugano Tamotsu shed light on this connection. I was explained by my informant Mr. Takagi at Seichō no Ie's international headquarters that this forced Seichō no Ie to publicly distance themselves from Nippon Kaigi, stating any such relationship had ended in 1983.

The post- war period again demonstrates how Taniguchi aptly manoeuvred the socio-cultural milieu of the period, in a way that was ambiguous enough to fit with several sentiments, be they peace related in later years, as McFarland's fieldwork suggests, or political, fitting with right-wing politics in immediate post-war years. What can be said is that through their actions, Seichō no Ie briefly started to regain followers. The following high economic growth period that formed Japan into an East-Asian economic power from its war-stricken past, led to an affluent society with people seeking other means of happiness beyond material ones. This created a new interest in spirituality and new religions, further drawing new members. This was again bolstered by the oil shock

and economic decline in proceeding years, but ended abruptly with the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo metro in 1995, ushering in a period of scepticism towards new religious leaders. Today this scepticism still lingers on, with the addition of modern societal, technological and global changes posing new challenges for new religious movements and their declining membership numbers.

The critics of Taniguchi Masaharu claim this history of the developments only demonstrates the chameleon-like and opportunistic side of Taniguchi and of Seichō no Ie's ability to adapt to any context: being emperor worshipping militarists when needed, altering course from their earlier sentiments to cooperate with Occupation forces in the name of democracy, and then revert back towards their former conservative inclinations, becoming more closely knit with right-wing reactionaries after the end of the Occupation (McFarland 1967, 157-158). In its most recent turn, Seichō no Ie is moving in the opposite direction, promoting world peace and a sustainable future. With Taniguchi's track record, it becomes difficult to gauge the true motives behind Seichō no Ie, but McFarland (1967, 158) reminds us, "sheer opportunism is rarely the key to the durability of religious movements", implying there is more to Seichō no Ie than its opportunism. On this last point I would contend that the institutional opportunism is in fact key to their survival, as a keen ability to evolve or adapt to any situation is essential in overcoming it, a truth growing ever more important in an era of climate change. This was considered to be one of Seichō no Ie's strengths according to my informant Mr. Sugimoto in Tokyo:

> Before environmental problems Seichō no Ie was politically involved domestically in for example the cold war between America's capitalism and the Soviet Union's communism, Seichō no Ie was influenced by that backdrop…The next societal, global problem that appeared was [the environmental one] and Seichō no Ie answered the demands of the time. That was Seichō no Ie's objective I think, to go along with the times. Seichō no Ie changes its colours to match the [pressing] issue of that time.

Mr. Takeda at the same facility as the former, also pointed out how Seichō no Ie's original goal has been that of living in harmony with all living beings and how "that expression has been changed to fit with the times."

According to Schönfeld (2012, 164) on whether a certain faith will persist or perish, he asks if a faith still inspires, agrees with the facts, and if it contains any ideas or values

that are currently needed. A religion's 'evolutionary fitness' is then, in his terms, part of an ongoing process of transformation and adaptation to the surrounding needs. Seichō no Ie's past malleability fits into such an evolutionary understanding, but this also raises questions regarding the more recent changes to the organization and the motivations behind them. Is the recent green turn truly motivated by the environmental crisis and its related concerns? Are there other motives behind them? Or is it a mix of both? What is clear however, regardless of motive, is that the Seichō no Ie of today has changed in a greener direction.

2.3.3 Seichō no Ie Today

As Taniguchi Masaharu had decreed that the leadership of Seichō no Ie be hereditary, after his death in 1985 leadership passed on Taniguchi Seichō. As son-in-law and a former psychology major, Taniguchi Seichō had been carefully groomed for the position of successor, becoming the second leader of Seichō no Ie (McFarland 1967, 248, Staemmler 2011b, 144). Like his father-in-law, he contributed towards the massive amount of literature, held lectures both in Japan and abroad, and spread Seichō no Ie's teachings. He was succeeded by the third and current president Taniguchi Masanobu in 2009. According to Seichō no Ie's webpage, Taniguchi Masanobu has, in similar fashion to his predecessors, dedicated himself to spreading Seichō no Ie's teachings through several visits and tours to the US, Brazil and Taiwan before his ascension to presidency, published a multitude of publications, and, in more recent years, devoted himself to the expansion of Seichō no Ie's activities as a human enlightenment and world peace movement. The relocation of Seichō no Ie's international headquarters can be regarded as his latest grand, and green, achievement.

What then are the current teachings of Seichō no Ie? As mentioned earlier, Taniguchi Masaharu's time within the new religion Ōmoto seems to have had quite the impact. Rather than a process of world renewal through calamitous disasters as Ōmoto's foundress promised in her script[8], Taniguchi interpreted these words to mean rather that man is a child of God and extrapolated from this that a loving and omnipotent god could not create a world of imperfection (Staemmler 2011b, 151-152). Humans could

[8] Deguchi Nao's script was fully written in the Japanese syllabary, thus wide open to interpretation.

therefore not be judged for their evil actions in a world that requires such evil acts from humans. As Staemmler (ibid.) explains:

> a loving and perfect creator could not have created an imperfect world in which some creatures had to kill others for their living and in which, consequently, humans could not justly be punished in a final divine judgement for crimes they were created to commit.

Figure 1 Logo of Seichō no Ie used in Japan. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Taniguchi Masaharu's answer is then, inspired by New Thought, that the phenomenal world we perceive around us is only a manifestation of the mind, with the true world (実相 *jissō*) lying beyond our perception, free of all ills and imperfections (Staemmler 2011b, 152-153). However, we are unable to completely observe this reality; our perception is blurred as if looking through a dirtied lens. Adopting Taniguchi's teachings that humans are children of God and therefore inherently perfect, with the addition of positive thinking, the symbolic lens becomes clear. Through personal change one becomes relieved of all ills and all personal problems (McFarland 1967, 162, Davies 1970, 103, ibid.). Achieving this atonement-focused state of mind, as well as disseminating it, becomes the main aspect for Seichō no Ie's members, with the final aim being a world that accepts these truths in order to create an equally perfect this-worldly paradise. According to Seichō no Ie doctrine, these truths need not be confined to Seichō no Ie as religion, but explicitly state that truths leading to the teachings in Seichō no Ie can be found in all religions. Their concept of truth is borrowed from several traditions (mainly Buddhism and Christianity) and one of their tenets *Bankyō kiitsu* (万教帰一), meaning ten thousand creeds return to the common source, as well as their logo[9] (Figure 1), reflects the eclectic and mixed religious nature of Seichō no Ie.

Seichō no Ie's tenet of acknowledging several traditions sharing central themes and a common origin is in no way unique. Other offshoots from Ōmoto hold similar ideas

[9] The red halo represents Amaterasu and the sun, the white fylfot represents Buddhism and the moon, the green color is a symbol for life and flourishing of man on earth the 32 lines in the halo represent the 32 fine phases of the Buddha.

(Stalker 2008, 152, Dessì 2017, 48). The idea is rooted in Taniguchi's own days with Ōmoto and their idea of many creeds with one root. In essence, though all creeds stem from a common source, Ōmoto is seen as the root, placing other religions or creeds in an inferior position (Stalker 2008, 152). Seichō no Ie's similar teaching is implicitly associated with the claim that while other religions may tend to fundamentalism, Seichō no Ie has privileged access to the truth that all teachings stem from a common source (Dessì 2017, 48). These claims of superiority, according to their teachings in relation to other religious groups, seem to be a common trait among the religions of Japan, new and old, and are especially relevant in the debate of religion's role in the face of the coming environmental crisis (Dessì 2017, 37-54).

True to its origins as a publishing venture, basic membership in Seichō no Ie is regarded as a reading membership through subscription to one or several of its periodicals, according to Staemmler (2011b, 149). As pointed out earlier, subscription numbers can possibly be used for membership statistics, again pointing out the problems of membership numbers as people may subscribe to publications yet not be active otherwise. To become an official member however, it is required to join Seichō no Ie's holy mission (*Seichō no Ie Seishimei Kai*), which funds maintenance and management of facilities and Seichō no Ie activities, and make monetary contributions to it based on varying levels of membership, with fees ranging from 400 JPY a month to donations above 100,000 JPY from honorary members (Seichō no Ie 2010). Seicho no Ie is registered as a religious corporation, and therefore, along with other Japanese religions, receives tax benefits on the grounds of religious groups being seen as a public good and are thus offered tax exemptions and reduced rates on grounds of providing a moral and spiritual service to society (Sakurai 2011, 107-108, 118). This is reminiscent of pre-war legislation where the state also offered religions economic support. Seichō no Ie's financial basis is made up of these donations, membership fees and income from their publishing enterprise through its own company Nihon Kyōbunsha, which remains the mainstay of Seichō no Ie's financial activities. In addition to these sources of income, and due to legislation allowing them reduced taxes or exemptions, donations finance a considerable part of their activities such as their most recent projects in renewables. Seichō no Ie has a strong financial basis with publishing as the main pillar, but donations and membership fees also play a significant role in funding the organisation and its activities.

Apart from being a source of income, the literary aspect of Seichō no Ie also plays a significant role in religious practice. Members and subscribers are presented articles on teachings as well as how they apply in one's daily life through Seichō no Ie's various publications. The movement's magazines are used in a group setting during informal study meetings termed *shiyūkai* (誌友会), where members either by themselves or led by a teacher, discuss themes raised in the magazines and their application to one's own life experiences. It also presents a semi-monthly opportunity to socialise with fellow Seichō no Ie members with the session usually ending with a small feast for the participants. McFarland (1967, 161-162) describes these that monthly association meetings take place in the homes of believers and include presentations followed by testimonials of illnesses or family issues that were resolved by adopting Seicho no Ie's teachings, something I was able to observe on one such occasion for myself where I heard similar testimonials. The monthly magazines published by the organisation also represent the different associations within Seichō no Ie that hold such meetings and serve as key functions of the new religious movement. The three largest associations under Seichō no Ie are its women's organization the White Dove Association (白鳩会 *Shirohatokai*), its Brotherhood Association (相愛会 *Sōaikai*) intended for middle-aged and older men, and its Youth and Young Adult Association (青年会 *Seinenkai*) intended for men and women between junior high school and their late thirties (Staemmler 2011b, 147-148). In addition to these are Seichō no Ie Prosperity Association (生長の家栄える会 *Seichō no Ie Sakaeru Kai*), an association for businesses that seeks to instil Seicho no Ie principles in businesses, and Seichō no Ie Teachers Association (生長の家教職員会 *Seichō no Ie Kyōshokuin Kai*) (Matsunaga 2000, 49). The international headquarters also has a presence on the social media platform Facebook where events, announcements, and links to other relevant websites are shared. The lack of activity and followers, however, suggest this is not widely used.

Taniguchi Masaharu's legacy of an impressive amount of written materials, made even more impressive by his successors' contributions, also stands as a testament to the depth and charisma of the movement's beliefs and leaders (Stalker 2008, 124). This is most apparent in its three monthly subscriber magazines that form the majority of written materials produced by the movement and correspond to the three largest associations mentioned above. Each of these contains an impressive amount of pieces penned by the

current president, next to his wife's and excerpts from predecessors', and serves the dual functions of being a source of financial revenue and platform for spreading their word. Reports of miraculous healings or positive changes and occurrences to individuals' daily lives are still often linked to the reading of Seichō no Ie publications, and thus play a significant part in drawing in new potential devotees to this day (McFarland 1967, 164-165, Staemmler 2011b, 149-151). The main monthly publications targeted at different audiences include: *Inochi no Wa* (いのちの環) whose front cover declares Seichō no Ie's goal of "harmony between humans and nature", *Shirohato* (白鳩) targeted at "beautiful women who love the earth", and *Hidokei24* (日時計 24) targeted at Seichō no Ie's younger readership and is a magazine about the way of life according to Seichō no Ie. Several issues of these were collected throughout fieldwork. The first of the three, *Inochi no Wa,* has several headlines on the front cover regarding environmental matters on many issues from 2017, especially on renewables or commentaries on Japanese energy policies. But even *Shirohato* in its 2017 November issue has an article on "My Eco-Life", showing also the women's interest in things ecological and that this interest goes beyond their monthly ecological *ikebana* (flower arrangement) which can be found on the first page. The subtitles such as *Inochi no Wa's* "harmony between humans and nature" and *Shirohato's* "beautiful women who love the earth" also hint at a larger re-focusing on ecological issues for the movement. These examples present clear examples of a broader growing observable interest in environmental issues on Seichō no Ie's part.

This chapter has chartered out the historic developments of new religious movements in Japan as a ways of painting a backdrop for Seichō no Ie. From its early days until modern times, a few elements of Seichō no Ie have remained stable while others have gone through repeated dynamic change in the face of greater social shifts. The greatest change perhaps, and of interest here, considering Seichō no Ie's political alliances in the past, is its contemporary interest in the environment. This begs the question of what intentions are behind an environmental turn, and how religion can work in synergy with environmental interests. These are the questions that are tackled in the next chapter.

3 The Environmental Turn

As was briefly mentioned previously, Seichō no Ie has in recent years considerably focused on their environmental efforts in an attempt to 'go green' or become 'ecologized' "in the sense of having developed ecological understandings and concerns" (Taylor 2010, 252). This is in accordance with Bron Taylor's hypothesis of greening religions, which suggests that as religions are exposed to or become aware of the negative environmental impacts of human behaviours, some transform themselves into eco-friendly versions of themselves, much like my informants spoke of Seichō no Ie's adaptability to environmental causes (Taylor 2011, 254). Gottlieb (2010, 499-502) suggests that today's greening religions and their environmental causes align themselves more with a leftist political orientation as our ecological crisis stems from the ills of modernity, capitalism, larger corporations or repressive governments. There are many examples that show such an environmental turn in religion, including Seichō no Ie, which suggests they may contribute towards articulating new ethics that can guide us towards a sustainable future (Hitzhusen and Tucker 2013). With the ethical implications and am increasing need for eco-friendly morals that comes with an impending environmental crisis, an amalgam of environmental issues and religion seem naturally compatible and poised on the brink of a larger green wave, something my informants also pointed out on several occasions. This chapter aims to clarify how religion and the environment are interrelated, or believed to be so, before pointing out some examples of the main critiques and problems of over-idealising religion as an ecological solution. How this is applicable in the case of Seichō no Ie's own environmental turn. The examples serve as cautionary tales for studying the greening of religions and highlights how critical thinking is of great need lest we draw too quick conclusions and selectively use Eastern green religions as 'subcontractor' for Western environmental aims.

3.1 Religion and the Environment

> Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is, by religion.
>
> (White 1967, 1205)

Though the connection between religion and our views on nature had been made earlier, it was not until Lynn White Jr.'s seminal article 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis' (1967) was published that the subject truly started to draw the attention of the academic world (Taylor 2016, 277-286). In his article, White argues that our relationship with nature has largely been shaped by the Judeo-Christian tradition and that it thus plays a part of our current ecological crisis. This argument is based on two points: Firstly, northern European farming practices required a move from subsistence farming to large scale farming techniques, thus humans dominated nature and coerced nature to meet the needs of man as exemplified through the Frankish calendar. Secondly, Christianity's victory over paganism led to the implementation of an idea of linear time beginning with Genesis, which describes how earth was created and bestowed to the human race by God (White 1967, 1205). The problem, as explained by White, is the rising dichotomy between humans and culture, and nature that developed in the wake of our use and abuse of the natural environment and our understanding of it as something to overcome and rule. Adam was created in God's image, not from nature, elevating him over the rest of creation, and was in turn told to "fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon this earth". The central point of the debate surrounding our environmental ills is the word 'dominion' (Gen 1:28). The consequence of humanity dominating earth, much in the way the Bible almost prophetically describes, has been climate change (Schönfeld 2012, 170).

White (1967, 1205) contrasts the rampant anthropocentrism he found in Christianity with animism found in Eastern traditions, even lauding them for what he saw as their close connection to and reverence for nature. He implied that "the victory of Christianity over paganism" removed the check of placating nature's guardian spirits before interfering with nature in some way, thus opening the bounties and spoils of nature to man in the name of God. Gottlieb (2010, 495) draws an example from Jewish critique that comes to the similar conclusion that the eschewing of paganism has left Judaism with an "adversarial relationship to the natural world." Schönfeld (2012, 155) similarly problematizes how the "Abrahamic religions" removed the divine from nature through setting the divine as something higher valued, being supernatural, and the focus on spiritual transcendence which lies in a similar state outside of or beyond nature.

Modern science and technology are rooted in natural theology's attempts to understand the divine through exploration of and experimentation in nature, as well as the transcendence of man over nature through his mastery of it. White (1967, 1206) believed a stronger reliance on technology or science was not the solution to remedy our ecological ills, as the issue goes deeper, and instead called for a new 'religion' or a reconfiguration of our existing ones. Considering that the roots of our ecological crisis are in part religious, at least in White's and other scholars' view, he believed a solution needs to similarly be so. In his own words, "we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man" (ibid., 1207). Regardless of societies becoming increasingly secular or not, White postulates that the sets of basic values of Western society, including that of elevating humans above nature, have nonetheless been shaped by Christianity. This sentiment is echoed by both Ingram (1997, 73) and Tucker and Grim (1997, XVI) when the latter say "…religion shapes our attitude towards nature in both conscious and unconscious ways." Schönfeld (2012, 153-154) in the opening of his text on the future of faith in an era of climate change also defends the linking of religion and environment through the connection of nature, culture and religion. In his terms civilization itself is a product of nature, civilization developed culture, and religion, being found within culture, is thus linked to and enveloped by nature. These three spheres share complicated relationships and are mutually influencing forces. Religion and our views of nature are therefore deeply intertwined. White illuminated two important points of our current ecologically precarious age: firstly, that our eco-crisis rests on the schism between humans and nature, and secondly, that the Judeo-Christian tradition has in part contributed to this divide. Confronted with this religions have been faced with serious questions and moral issues.

3.1.1 Can Faith Move Mountains?

> The sin is collective and the need for repentance is as well.
>
> (Gottlieb 2007, 82)

With the environmental crisis affecting us all, it also concerns religions. As religion has had an impact on us either in conscious or unconscious ways, as previously stated, whether we be religiously devout or not, today's religions and their adherents too must grapple with the problems of an unsustainable world. White (1967, 1205) argues that we

live with the same worldview now as 1700 years ago: we still have an implicit faith in growth and progress, which he argues is rooted in Judeo-Christian teleology. The new realities of an ecological crisis, as well as the criticisms it has inspired, have forced religious actors to go inwards and critique themselves. The ripples caused by White's discussion highlighted a connection between the environment and religion and thus opened up a new field of research which explored the themes of religion and the relationship humanity has with their environment. The most far reaching consequence of the debate on the matter was perhaps the series of publications and conferences initiated by the Centre for the Study of World Religions at Harvard and the birth of journals such as the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* and *Worldviews* that attempted to tackle such heavy subjects. The resulting publications explore the world religions and their relationship to ecology. The self-critical explorations of religions by their respective adherents themselves raises deep ethical issues and, while identifying the failings of others in regards to the environment, the most important finding has been the admittance of failures within their own ranks (Gottlieb 2007, 82).

The environmental debate presents a major challenge for religions as many traditions have focused on individual salvation and therefore often rejected this world as a source of corruption (Tucker and Grim 1997, XXV). In our current environmentally precarious age these traditions are met with larger issues that challenge certain elements in their respective religious traditions. The exploration of religion in an ecological context thus represents a new phase for many. Even the Catholic Church has elevated the environmental cause to the same level as other social issues. The pinnacle of Christian environmentalism is pope Francis'(2015) encyclical that states humans are responsible for the environment and fate of the planet (Gottlieb 2010, 497).

Since the publishing of White's seminal piece, his claims have been debunked and critiqued many times over in the ensuing debate in that they simplify a highly complex issue, yet there is a consensus regarding the idea of the Judeo-Christian tradition playing at least some part in creating a rift between humans and nature. In addition to the Christian tradition, Bruun and Kalland (1995, 1, 9-10) and Ingram (1997, 73-74) also add the Western philosophical tradition as contributor to our current understanding of nature as an opposing force to human culture, creating a nature/culture dichotomy.

Wilfred (2009, 50) sees White's commentary as written from the viewpoint of Western enlightenment anthropocentrism which "fosters disenchantment with nature as a mark of progress and secular humanism." This very enlightenment also taught that human creativity was born from the transcendence of nature and the realm of necessity. The highlighting of linkages between religion and our destructive views of nature have birthed a new discourse in academic circles, even fostering the growth of a religious environmentalism where different traditions tackle critique and failings of both themselves and others.

It is these insights Miller (2013, 250-251) ascribes to the desperate search for religious inspiration in Eastern religious traditions, simply due to the view of "these traditions as 'others', opposed to the dominant discourse of modernity", offering an alternative to Western failings. Grønvold (2013, 267), in his discussion of a greening Church of Norway, showcases an increasingly environmentally engaged Christianity that similarly criticises the rampant consumption of resources and its relation to issues of sustainability. However, religious innovation towards sustainability is also taking place beyond this through radical re-interpretations of biblical texts and philosophy, placing humans in a greater context of a bio-centric community (ibid., 271-274). The new religious quest for sustainability points to a "pastoral renaissance" signalled by:

> …the emergence of a new-old mind-set that aspires to reclaiming nature, culture, and spirituality, influencing green architecture, and furthering alternative models of consumption. The pastoral renaissance encompasses a mosaic of visions and ideas. Some are individual, original attempts to name and codify wisdom and practice through which humanity can link, not just with the transcendent, but with all of nature. (Witoszek 2013, 238)

Religious environmentalism can then be termed as a critique of the failings of modern society while religious actors also admit that religion is a part of this problematic modernity. The question then is: how is this ecological religious shift or 'pastoral renaissance' expressed? Gottlieb (2007, 84-88) presents some trends for how religious environmentalism adapts and teaches one to look at the environment, and ourselves, in new ways. Firstly, religions become more engaged with environmental issues through scientists and data on our global environment, becoming aware of society's, as well as their own, shortcomings and causes for environmental degradation. Secondly, considering the massive scope of the ecological threat and its potential solution,

collaborators and allies become a necessity. Environmentally engaged religions therefore become increasingly ecumenical in their outlook, seeking both non- and inter-religious cooperation and collaborators. Thirdly, ideas of interconnectedness between humans, and between humans and nature become more prevalent along with ideas of environmental justice. Engaging such topics requires new practices and rituals, but also political influence as religious groups becomes more socially engaged. Lastly, ecojustice ideals born from environmental leanings drive religions in a more progressive direction meaning they often align with the political left or even adopt a fully anti-capitalist stance.

As we will see in greater detail later, Seichō no Ie is indeed taking part in such a 'pastoral renaissance', made visible through its new environmental international headquarters and the activities and alternative solutions and consumption patterns advocated by the movement's various associations. This ecological shift also follows Gottlieb's points in that Seichō no Ie recognized the ills of climate change due to increasing scientific data. Seichō no Ie is also increasingly ecumenical in outlook by collaborating with other religious groups in renewable energy schemes, and I was informed a visitor from the new religious movement *Sekai Kyūseikyō* had in similar fashion to me come to observe Seichō no Ie's new headquarters. A more holistic view of humans and nature is also the driving force behind their ideas on energy and nature that are challenging the current status quo. As Mrs. Hayashi in Seichō no Ie's Ibaraki facility explained:

> The way of thinking that humans are the most important, that if it is for humanity's happiness, it is fine to destroy nature, it is fine to use as much energy as one can, [that way of thinking] belongs to the 'old civilization[10]'.

It is through the above points we can see how religious environmentalism defines the locus of the environmental ills of our age. In Wilfred's (2009, 46) terms:

> The convergence of perspectives among religions and a common engagement in the cause of the environment and social justice will naturally lead them to challenge the present dominant economy. In this sense, religions necessarily have to become political for the salvation of humanity. A greed- and competition-based system of economy and an unbridled production and consumption pattern will stretch the earth beyond

[10] Seichō no Ie terms what is yet to come and its goals of a sustainable society as the "new civilization" as opposed to the problematic "old civilization" in which we live now.

> its regenerative capacity. Unchecked, this system and pattern of life will lead the human species to disaster and even extinction. That will be the revenge of nature, which will go on even without human species.

How, then, can faith help in concretely remedying our environmentally destructive ways and reduce the gap between human and nature? Considering the far-reaching effects and scale of climate change, greater global cooperation becomes a necessary step towards a solution. The environmental problems and search for their solution is already inspiring religious traditions to work together, and their growth is a testament to the sway they hold over people in potentially forming a new environmental consciousness (Tucker 2002). Wilfred (2009) also calls for greater inter-religious dialogue in the hopes of greater collaboration resulting in a new form of inter-religious eco-theology that can bring about internal change. This change may also be brought about by alternative readings of religions in order to foster a more ecological outlook (Wainwright 2009). Gottlieb (2010, 492-493) raises questions of the worldview of Abrahamic religions, stating they do not merely see the world, and thus nature, as materials for human use, but as a sign of God's generosity and is only temporarily ours as it ultimately belongs to God. Moving on, he draws on marginalized thinkers or groups, such as St. Francis of Assisi, and examples from the bible showing care and reverence for non-human nature as sources for ecological inspiration (Darragh 2009, Gottlieb 2010, 493-494). This however, is a selective reading as the opposite could be just as easily proved as was White's case, but this problem presents the central work of eco-theology which is to shift focus to a more sustainable one.

This broader greening of religion was something my informants at the Seichō no Ie international headquarters were aware of. Seminars had been held on the subject, leading to large discussions of how traditions were re-inventing themselves in the face of a climate crisis. A Mr. Matsuo acknowledged these various religions' efforts, stating that "everyone is looking into this to the point of it giving headaches". The way toward religious innovation for sustainability was not to be found by focusing on the negative, but looking at what was good and compatible with a sustainable future.

Although the effectiveness of religious authorities espousing moral environmental ideals cannot be expected to solve the environmental issue, appealing to our moral senses from a religious point of view has been beneficial in past campaigns for anti-slavery and in civil rights arenas (Gottlieb 2010, 498). Witoszek (2013, 241) similarly

refers to religion's ability to inspire change or social transformation in numerous upheavals, which in itself is paradoxical considering religion's natural tendency to conserve and preserve. At best religion may work as a motivator for behaviour and as source for values and practices (though these may be found outside the realm of religion as well). But for this to be effective Gottlieb (2010, 502-503) believes religions need to provide concrete alternatives, as admonishing devotees of their environmental obligations is simply not enough. What we need then in the religious realm are more 'earth spiritualties, which Darragh (2009, 76) terms as all philosophies, theologies, ideologies and spiritualties that promote ideas of sustainability, the precautionary principle, 'better' rather than 'more', conservation over exploitation, thresholds of growth and seeks to live in balance within the larger earth system. Religion would appear to be an apt companion to sustainability as its religious mind-set is inherently similar in that it involves limiting human appetites (Witoszek 2013, 241). Darragh (2009, 81-84) draws from traditions within Christian asceticism to create an explicit alternative and contemporary way of expressing beatitudes and teaches "disciplined living for the greater good". Such a way of living guides mind and heart in the direction of a lifestyle that is in accordance with earth spiritualties, distant from prevalent and unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. My informant Mrs. Hayashi made similar references to the modest life of her religion's founder and how he expressed his appreciation for the simple things in life. This form of 'voluntary simplicity' or 'simple living' functions as:

> …a kind of restraint that allows focus on the emergence of good, the healthy, and the beautiful. It promotes a sense of liberation from addictions and consumer attitudes that now appear as mental and emotional chains. The new asceticism opens new possibilities for conviviality that do not require possession or consumption. By giving up the pursuit of many trivial satisfactions we are able to pursue those few things that are more valuable to us, most of which can only be enjoyed and admired, not possessed or consumed (ibid., 84).

What these scholars and others have shown are indeed alternatives to our current societal paradigm that promotes unsustainable behaviours and provides "a many-faceted alliance of religion and ecology" that pays attention to the whole community of life, rather restricting such concerns purely to humans (Tucker and Grim 2007). Many of them are placed in a Western context however, which brings our discussion to how

religion and environment is regarded in other societies under influence of other traditions, namely in a Japanese context as is the case of my study.

3.2 Green Faith in Japan

The idea of Eastern religious traditions as a panacea for all environmental ills is often addressed in academic work on the subject of religion and the environment, raising questions about a dichotomy of an East in harmony with nature contrasted with the West's destruction of, and disassociation with, nature (Kalland and Asquith 1997, 1-2, Kalland 2002, 145-146, Miller 2013, 250-251, Taylor 2016, 279,287-290). Similar ideas remain strong within Japan as well, with the reasoning behind this often linked to the openness and acceptance found in religions such as Shinto and Buddhism as opposed to their Western counterparts (Dessì 2017, 37-46, 91). One of earth spirituality's outstanding tasks is to foster a more complex understanding of nature and a green religion provides "an attractive antidote to the West's spiritual malaise, social violence, economic inequality and callousness to non-human nature: a harmonious future characterized by fulfilling relationships among the earth's diverse forms of life" (Taylor 2010, 10). Wilfred (2009, 44) suggest the biological sciences have the power to break down our perceptional barriers through making one realize the interconnectedness of all life: we, including all species and life forms, have developed over time and have many life-processes in common. He further presents how understandings of interconnectedness have encountered resistance in Western monotheism but intersect with more holistically inclined faiths found in the East.

As Chaplin (2016, 2-3) briefly explains, the main claim is that Eastern traditions frame environmental questions against a background of a sacralized idea of nature. Schönfeld (2012, 169) uses the term 'pagan' to define traditions of an animistic and more holistically inclined nature by returning to the root *paganus* meaning people who live close to the land and imbue it with spiritual value. Thus the pagan, or, as is the case here, more holistically inclined Eastern tradition, accepts nature as part of the divine, and the divine as part of nature; nature is both created and creative (Schönfeld 2012, 170). Building further on this it would supposedly go against reason to lead earth to its early demise through our vandalisation of its nature since nature, in a pagan or animistic sense, becomes active and that our actions will incur nature's wrath in a fashion

reminiscent of Lovelock's (2006) Gaia, leading to dire consequences. With the flattening and increased interconnectedness of the world, it is Schönfeld's (2012, 170-171) belief that paganism, sharing similar ideas and values regardless of origin and thus compatible with a global community, contains a quintessence that might make a comeback as the oncoming climate crisis reinforces interreligious dialogue and the need for new holistic ideas and values in overcoming it. In this sense, nature-as-sacred religion ought to be welcomed as it "represents a potentially valuable contribution to the social mobilization necessary for the creation of environmentally sustainable and socially just life-ways" (Taylor 2010, 218).

Of such nature-as-sacred religions that have inspired similar sentiments and continually support it, Buddhism has regularly been seen as a source of such an ecological mind-set, and more recently Shinto as well. Throughout their history Buddhism and Shinto have shared a syncretic relationship in the Japanese religious landscape and hold concepts of Buddha nature or *kami* (神 - gods or deities) respectively as inherent parts of nature, both imbuing the land with spiritual value and being free of sharp human/nature distinctions as in Judeo-Christian traditions (Kalland and Asquith 1997, 2-4). Additional aspects of Buddhism that deviate from a Christian perspective is firstly its non-teleological understanding of the world (unlike an earth as designed by God), meaning the universe simply is (Ingram 1997, 79-80). Secondly, Buddhism views the world as a series of connected parts, as opposed to seeing individual parts with strict relationships to each other; things are not set in stone but are fluid (ibid., Kalland and Asquith 1997, 9). Lastly, due to this fluid understanding, there is no hierarchy that sets humans or nature above the other (Ingram 1997, 79-80). A potential solution for realigning Western faith with the environment is, in Ingram's (ibid., 83-84) eyes, an encounter between East and West in order to enter a self-reflecting dialogue to raise a greater environmental awareness of interconnectedness as espoused in certain strands of Buddhism. Parkes (1997) calls for a similar 're-visioning' of our relationship with the natural world and a change towards something less hubristic but suggests some instruction or guidance (through Buddhism) is required to reach such a state. In his study Odin (1997) compares the field theory of Aldo Leopold and Japanese Buddhist views that hold similar paradigms of holistically viewing man and nature as interrelated exemplified through the metaphor of Indra's net. His solution is a new blend of these Eastern and Western thoughts being able to lead us towards a sustainable future with

Leopold's ideas of land as a single large organism using the ideas of Taoism and Buddhism as theoretical support. A common thread is the lack of more critical views. Obadia (2013) points out how although rife with ecological interpretations, wider implementation is complex and difficult. Their effectiveness on national scale "is far from being as great as the hope placed in it by eco-Buddhists suggests" (ibid. 2013, 322). This suggests there may be another side to the discussion of Buddhism and ecology that creates a less positive image, showing that Buddhism too may have its limitations.

In the case of Shinto, the concept of *kami* (gods) residing in natural phenomena is considered the source for the religion's understanding and harmony with nature, as expected from a 'pagan' religion[11], as well as fostering an acceptance of multiple truths, making it more adaptable to new ideas. The president of the Association of Shinto Shrines (神社本庁 *Jinja Honchō)* has made remarks of the great environmental importance of Shinto, claiming it contains ancient ecological knowledge that sees human and nature as parts of a whole, although this is based only on a handful of tree planting and local preservation projects, and is more of a recent invention (Rots 2017, 65-66). This trend also appears in scholarly discourse such as Shaw (2010) who presents an ecological attitude appropriate for the 21st century based on Shinto ideals and teachings. Basing himself on the above remarks, Dessì (2017, 44-46) suggests there is a commonly held idea linking the West's monotheism to shallow ecology while Shinto is linked with deep ecology[12], with the former being the source of our ecological crisis and the latter containing its holistically based solution. A mainstream idea of Shinto as ecological saviour has grown based on the belief that Shinto has ancient environmental roots and holds teachings that may restore human-nature relationships (Rots 2017, 67, 69-70). This paradigm, Rots (ibid., 69-70) argues, grew from the scholarly discourse and work surrounding localized forest preservation studies and activities, and spiritual intellectuals who are associated with *nihonjinron*, a school of thought that sees Japan as unique, whose interests:

[11] Shinto is here referred to as 'pagan' in Schönfeld's terms, in that it sees divinity in certain designated natural phenomena.

[12] The rhetoric of combining deep ecology with Shinto is present on the Association of Shinto Shrines' webpage stating things like "Shinto has always made one of its highest priorities coexistence with nature", and the large amount of forest cover in Japan " is rather due to the influence of Japanese ancient civilization which respected the forest, treating it in a spiritual sense as well. This long continuing value system has made it possible to protect the forests in such a way until present day" (Association of Shinto Shrines 2011)

> rather than 'spirituality' per se, it is the essence and origins of the Japanese nation that constitute their main research interest; their descriptions of Japanese spirituality and sacred places are embedded within a larger ideological discourse that is primarily concerned with the question of what it means to be Japanese. Many of their works have clear romantic-nationalist subtexts and are characterized by nostalgic lamentation of lost values and traditions.

A similar example of combining religion to national identity can be found in China where Daoism is playing a role in the shift towards a sustainable China. Miller (2013, 254) presents how environmental values are intertwined with Chinese patriotism as ecological insights seek inspiration and are based upon traditional Chinese values. Similarly in Japan, Shinto, along with Buddhism and other new religious movements contribute towards the East's spiritual superiority by combining environmental ideas with indigenous ones and:

> …maintain that this ancient Japanese tradition – or, more precisely, their interpretations of it – has global significance. Accordingly, they believe that it is their task to share this tradition, and its soteriological potential, with the world (Rots 2017, 42).

This frames religion in a way that makes it relevant for the world and its problems, it becomes 'relativized', a point I return to in the next section.

From the above examples it would seem we were at some threshold of a religious green revolution, but why has this not manifested itself yet? The idea of the Japanese having a deep and almost reverent and superior regard for nature still persists through the testimony of endless references to nature in art and religion, along with various expressions of such sensibilities. One interviewee suggested the existence of a similar deep bond between nature and the Japanese people:

> I wonder if one can say it's in the blood of the Japanese, the seasons… In Japan one really has spring, summer, autumn and winter, four [very distinct] seasons. Originally, right, we cultivated and had fields and rice fields among mountains, rivers and plains, right? So we have long history of being a race living along with nature…

This is despite there being vast evidence of the contrary, ranging from mercury poisoning of water ways, to overseas deforestation by Japanese actors (Kalland 1995, 245). The narrative of my informant is also tenuous as being a former agricultural

society is in no way unique to the Japanese people (Japanese rice farming is even thought to have been an import from the Asian mainland). Rather this use of Japan's seasons plays into an "orientalist discourse" that sets Japan apart from the West (Moeran and Skov 1997, 182). Notions of a Japanese love for nature share a similar connection to *nihonjinron* as ideas of the greening of religion in Japan, through liberal use of references to animism or shamanism, are used to assert Japan's spiritual superiority in comparison the West's lacking spirituality (Kalland 1995, 244, Dessì 2017, 61). Japan however, as Kalland (1995) points out in his work, exudes no more love for nature through their supposed sensitivity and metaphors than any other society. He concludes that there is hardly any direct relationship between such a sensitivity, religious or otherwise, and any noticeable environmental concern. As a source of metaphors, nature is loved only in certain contexts and "the quantity of nature, if I can put it that way, is of no great importance, and nature invisible to an actor - as one located in faraway places – is of little general interest" (ibid., 254-255). Miller (2013, 262) draws a similar conclusion in his exploration of Daoism and its role in the greening of China, stating that preservation of Chinese nature is linked to Chinese cultural heritage, through Daoism, rather than a particular reverence for or interest in nature instilled by religion. This raises several questions: Are Eastern religious traditions truly any better equipped in the face of an ecological crisis? Does a holistic religious vision truly foster environmental concern? And what motivates the greening of religion? These are the questions tackled below.

3.2.1 Cautionary Tales of Studying Green Religion: Motivations for Going Green

> … the greening of religions in Japan implies another kind of reorienting, that is, the creation of new religious identities through the original adaptation of global ideas about ecology.
>
> (Dessì 2017, 94)

As inspirational and environmentally compatible ecological readings of religions may seem, there has been a lack of critical examinations of religion and their environmental attitudes. This has been presented above through a few scholars' arguments showing the complexity of the ties between religion and nature. Some scholars point out several contentions that question the validity of green religion or critique the process and

academic field. The first of these contentions is that religious teachings are commonly believed or proposed as ways of fostering or determining pro-environmental views and behaviours. Secondly, linking religious tradition with global and modern concerns such as our global environmental crisis is untenable. Thirdly, ecological readings or reinterpretations of religion as ecological are problematic. And lastly, the driving forces of or motivations for the greening of religion are highly varied and few have asked how this can be potentially used for aims other than expressing environmental concerns. I explore each of these points in turn.

As previously presented, many have sought religious inspiration for changing environmentally destructive behaviour. This, however, implies that religious values or norms dictate what one should and should not do, and that norms have the ability to bring about certain actions. Holy and Stuchlik (1983, 82) contradict this by stating that norms depend on context, are fluid and that actors invoke different norms for different contexts and situations. At best norms function as a source of guidance and may be manipulated, used or disregarded since "[b]y themselves they are merely a specific category of notions without any predetermined relationship to actions, and sociologically they are made relevant only when people invoke or disregard them in their actions, explicitly or implicitly" (ibid., 83). Holy and Stuchlik (ibid.) leave us with goals or some future state of affairs as the link between norms and actions. The attainment of this future state, the goal of the action, becomes what dictates which norm is invoked. Suggesting that norms or values instilled by green religion may directly change environmentally destructive habits is therefore erroneous as there is no definite and direct link that exists between the two. However, values, they point out, are still important as they may still serve the purpose of a guideline thus potentially having some effect on actions. In conclusion, actions aspire to some goal rather than being determined by norms, but norms hold a limited sway over our actions in the capacity of a moral guideline.

In his work Pedersen (1995) suggests that the religious environmentalist paradigm, in which religions appeal to traditional religious ideas and values in regards to the environment, are more related to concerns of cultural identity rather than those related to the environment. As religion encounters the global community, they are in turn faced with global issues and are thus forced to deal with them (Pedersen 1995, 271). The

environmental crisis becomes one such global issue - large and serious enough to require the attention of broader sections of society, with religion playing their part. The answer to this clash between religion and the dire environmental situation becomes linking traditional and local ideas to large scale ecological problems with the religion thus being able to engage with them and gaining cultural significance (Pedersen 1995, 272). Pedersen's 'religious environmentalist paradigm,' in which religions realign their traditions with ecological issues, becomes an expression of religions' "forceful cultural creativity" (Pedersen 1995, 272).

However, the creative process of connecting religious traditions with the climate crisis raises two issues: firstly, the ecological concepts found in greening religions are incompatible with the projections of modern ecological knowledge and science, and secondly, the ecological view of a global ecosystem inherent to ecological discourse, could not possibly predate a global view that only came about as a consequence of Western imperial expansion (Pedersen 1995, 266-269). On the first point, claiming that the modern ecological knowledge is one and the same as the knowledge found in religious traditions, as many idealistic scholars and religionists have often presented, a distortion of history is created. The work on climate science and ecosystems has its basis on a long standing scientific tradition and made its greatest strides only in recent history, whereas religions and their knowledge (often) had their nascence prior to this. Combining the two thus becomes anachronistic. On the second point, the ecological view of a global ecosystem stands in stark contrast to the highly local nature of traditional religious representations. Similarly to the above, the global view inherent to ecological concerns and needed to engage with climate change as supposedly found in green religion becomes anachronistic in that such views first came about through Western imperialism. The greening of religions then represent the respective religious traditions' cultural creativity and innovative panache and function as a means to prove to themselves and others, that they hold cultural significant. The imagined combinations of traditions to ecological values shows their relevance in the ongoing environmental debate rather than being an original source of ecological knowledge fit for our time (Pedersen 1995, 272). Put more succinctly, the greening of religion is an expression of religious innovation, an attempt to re-imagine religion in the face of modern issues.

To enter the environmental debate, religions need to be re-imagined so they can contribute towards discussions regarding our environment. This requires a relativization of religion and its teachings, such as tying religious knowledge to that of the global environmental ones above, leading to re-readings and re-interpretations of its former teachings to fit with current trends. Since White's essay several faiths have look inwards for ecological teachings (Pedersen 1995, 261-263). These ecological interpretations are, however, problematic, considering the two points mentioned above. Furthermore, while the strength of religious dogma is their power of interpretation, it also becomes their weakness as contradictions, different interpretations and reinterpretations may be just as easily found as solutions to the eco-crisis (Kalland 2008, 101).

In the Japanese context, Kalland (ibid., 101-102) exemplifies this contradictory relationship of interpretations within Buddhism and Shinto. Firstly, if a holistic view of nature considers all things, man-made or natural, as parts of a whole, a view there are many proponents of, then a red-crowned crane (*grus japonensis*) may be interpreted as possessing a Buddha nature or be an expression of *kami* in equal measure as that of a dumping sight for nuclear waste. Such an ecocentric interpretation, he contends, would not promote ecological responsibility or awareness of our environmentally destructive habits since these expressions too may become infused with the divine, meaning holistic or ecocentric interpretations have the potential to become part of the problem rather than its solution.

Secondly, seeing the world and thus nature as a continuous - rather than unchanging and absolute – process, it becomes contextual, opening up for a range of definitions and views: nature may be wild and dangerous as a roaring storm, or nature can be a highly cultivated bonsai tree. It is this latter form that is most valued in Japan as it brings the natural into a social context through our selective process of including and excluding certain natural elements. Wilderness, on the other hand, becomes part of the external sphere, untamed and abhorred for its dangers. Since it lies outside the social realm, any thought for or obligations towards it disappears, leading to wild nature garnering little to no attention, nor fostering any obligation of care towards it unless it causes ramifications in the sociocultural sphere. The potential result is that some nature

becomes relevant and worthy of care and attention, while some nature is excluded, forgotten or feared.

Thirdly, a cyclical understanding of nature, as encouraged through Buddhism, may degrade the value of natural objects with the idea or related metaphors, rather than an object's physical manifestation, being regarded as more important. Fourthly, the idea of karma is closely connected to ideas of liberation from an endless cycle of death and rebirth. This manifests itself in teachings and practice as a retreat from this world and its suffering, an escapist idea hardly appropriate to combat the maladies of an unsustainable world we are faced with that require concrete action.

Fifthly, returning to ideas of holism and paganism as proposed by Schönfeld (2012), the infusion of spirits or deities in nature as a way of fostering deeper relationships to our environment becomes equally problematic. In the pagan sense of an active nature, feedback through climate change is interpreted as signs of misgivings from the spiritual realm. However, the deification of nature becomes in no way a guarantee for safeguarding against environmental destruction as, in the case of Shinto, ceremony and ritual allows one to interact with nature and its spirits through ritual, to quell and placate, thus allowing one to proceed unhindered to exploit nature as one sees fit by simply moving or appeasing spirits through a ritual (Kalland 1995, 249, Kalland and Asquith 1997, 19-20). Religion in this sense becomes a means to interact with nature much in line with White's suggestion that the Judeo-Christian tradition gave humanity a free pass to exploit nature's bounty.

Interpretations and selective readings of religious dogma become highly problematic, as one can easily find arguments for one side or the other (Gottlieb 2006, 23-26). In her book, Haraway (1989, 247) criticises western academic 'greens' for applying a "cannibalistic western logic that readily constructs other cultural possibilities as resources for western needs and actions." She goes on stating that Taoism or Hinduism as source for environmental knowledge is simply used as "flavourful ingredients in their own recipe for 'sustainability' or 'biocentrism'" (ibid.). At the same time, the religious environmentalist paradigm performs the function of an 'Oriental mirror', providing a platform for critique of Western industrialism and practices (Kalland 2008, 102). Ecological readings of religion contribute to an East/West divide, but also provide a

premise for criticizing hegemonic values and economic models that, in addition to religion, have contributed to humanity's estrangement from nature.

With the tenuous relationship between religion and the environment as the above arguments illustrates, it becomes more relevant to ask what the motivations behind a green transition might be, as this is of essence for understanding the driving forces behind greening religions. More recent studies placed in a Japanese context have arrived at similar conclusions to Pedersen that an environmental turn bears more meaning as a pursuit of significance rather than pure concern for the climate, though the two may work in concord. Highly relevant to the case of Seichō no Ie is the work of Gagné (2017) who observes a similar new religious movement's attempts at reshaping itself in response to challenges encountered in a shifting society. This is expressed through making changes to become more accessible, seeking improved standing with other organizations, religious or secular, and trying to grow internationally in a globalizing world. Although this example is not directly linked with environmental efforts, the development is reminiscent of Pedersen's religious environmentalist paradigm of realigning oneself in pursuit of a goal. Gagné terms this process of change as 'reflexive secularization', where this:

> …refers to the process of how religious organizations reflexively – that is, self-consciously and purposefully – transform religious elements including teachings, symbols, rituals, and rhetoric in response to external factors, which include public perceptions of religion, challenges in attracting new members, and interaction with other religions and with non-religious discourses and practices (ibid., 155).

Though not explicitly of an ecological nature, as is the case of my study, it aptly describes the process of adopting an environmental stance in response to outside pressures, whether to gain significance in a modern world, as Pedersen proposes, or to gain relevance and draw new followers for one's beliefs as was the case for Gagné's study. As the history of Seichō no Ie illustrated in Chapter 2, Seichō no Ie's adaptability or 'reflexive secularization' can again be observed in its shift when faced by the environmental discourse. The challenges presented through Gagné's example are also relevant to many other contemporary new religious movements, including Seichō no Ie (ibid., 158). These involve the changing demographics of Japan's ageing population, meaning new religious movements' membership is 'greying'. Women, representing a large segment of new religious movements' members and volunteer labour, are

increasingly entering the workforce, which forces new religious movements to be more flexible and leaving less time for women being religiously active. As mentioned previously, the stigma of new religious movements in a post-Aum scandal era are also making attracting new members more difficult than before and a changed housing economy and increased anonymization of tenants makes door-to-door proselytization difficult. To counter these trends and become more attractive to potential devotees, re-branding oneself as 'modern' and 'cosmopolitan' while downplaying religious aspects (to the extent of completely omitting religious-like language in Gagné's case) and expanding internationally becomes a way to compensate for societal shifts (ibid., 162). I suggest environmentalism may play an equal role in drawing acclaim and members.

Another very similar example is that of the new religious movement Risshō Kōsei Kai, where their process of greening involves creative re-readings of their own teachings (Dessì 2017, 146-149). By doing so, they relativize themselves on the account of their affinity with global environmentalism. For Dessì (ibid., 57-58) however, the global repositioning of religions is also driven by a quest for power, especially so in involvement with ecological issues, where the religious groups themselves are seen as a source for solutions thus relativizing them in the global climate debate. The global consciousness in Gagné's argument is also prevalent in Dessì's (ibid., 163-165), especially in how the global solidarity for the environment not only fosters inter-religious dialogue and cooperation but also forces religious groups to adapt and change according to their own and others' needs as they become increasingly enmeshed in global cultural flows.

The above examples bring one to question the motives behind religious environmentalism, as they illustrate how the development towards a green religion is or can be influenced by concerns completely unrelated to the environment. This is not to rule out the existence of environmental concerns or activities within religious ranks, but highlights the intricate context from which they emerge. Motives such as Japanese Buddhists trying to move away from 'funerary Buddhism', or reconnecting with believers who are usually disconnected from temples or shrines (along with their efforts) demonstrate that matters other than environmental ones are perhaps more pressing and potentially devastating for religions. This rings true for smaller new religious movements as well, with drawing new members perhaps providing a more

compelling incentive for change than a wish to combat climate change (Dessì 2017, 82-83). It is the aforementioned points presented here that I keep in mind as I explore the greening of Seichō no Ie. Linking religion and ecological problems becomes somewhat problematic, yet ecologized religions too hold us in their sway, exerting influence on us in the form of values and serve the function of a moral compass, playing an integral role in a sustainable future (Witoszek 2013, 245). The question is if Seichō no Ie presents a viable alternative that holds such a transformative and much needed potential. But I also ask what it is that compels their green transformation in recent years and how they frame climate change and the eco-crisis. However, before delving into these questions I present the concrete efforts that have been taken to reduce the environmental impact of Seichō no Ie in its entirety. I will also discuss how the green shift of the Seichō no Ie environmentalist paradigm is manifesting itself in religious innovation for sustainability.

4 The Greening of Seichō no Ie

> What is required of the humankind today is the religious mind of appreciating the blessings of nature, worshipping the mountains, rivers, grass, trees, minerals and energy as manifestations of Life of God or Buddha, and being aware that we are given life to be in harmony with them. We believe living a life that is based on this religious mind is the key to solving the global environmental issue. (Seichō no Ie 2000)

So opens the document outlining Seichō no Ie's environmental policy, first published in 2000 and marking the start of an outwardly visible ecological stance for the new religious movement. In this chapter, I present my findings from my visits to several locations belonging to Seichō no Ie with the aim of illuminating how the new religious movement is contributing towards religious innovations for sustainability.

4.1 Kyoto *Kyōkabu*

Located in the Sakyō ward of the north-eastern part of Kyoto, near the misty hills that encompass that part of the city, is the around 50 year old building that today houses the local Seichō no Ie *kyōkabu*. As explained in Chapter 1, the term *kyōkabu* carries the connotation of an 'educating' or 'enlightening' facility and these function as local offices; meeting halls and places of worship for Seichō no Ie adherents all throughout Japan. I was greeted by one of my informants who was to show me how the environmental ambitions of Seichō no Ie played out on the level of their local *kyōkabu*. Over the years managerial reforms and the small incremental steps that had been taken to reduce their environmental impact and carbon footprint had influenced the running of the local Seichō no Ie *kyōkabu*. Two years prior to my visit a rapid charging station for electric vehicles had been installed. In addition to gently nudging both employees and visiting members of Seichō no Ie towards the use of hybrid or electric vehicles, the charging station is freely available for public use, thus Seichō no Ie contributes towards the aims of Kyoto city in expanding the network for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles along with other businesses and religious groups (Next Generation Vehicle Promotion Center 2013, 3,14). The facility was also equipped with rainwater collectors in an effort to reduce water usage, something that was important, according to my informant, considering the amount of water used for laundry and cleaning after gatherings and events at the *kyōkabu.* Its use also included the watering of the garden behind the

building as well as the plants and vegetables grown locally for use within the *kyōkabu* during events and ceremonies.

Figure 2 Seichō no Ie's Kyoto *kyōkabu.* Credit: Marius Lian

With almost 16 % of Japan's electricity generation consisting of renewables as of 2018 according to numbers from the International Energy Agency (2018), increasing the use of renewable energy naturally becomes the focus for making strides towards a sustainable society, especially so after the Tōhoku earthquake which showed the dangers of nuclear power. At the Seichō no Ie Kyoto *kyōkabu* solar panels were installed, as with most other Seichō no Ie facilities, on the roof to decrease their reliance on non-renewables and lower greenhouse gas emissions. When I pointed out the noticeable increase in solar energy in Japan compared to my earlier visits, my informant agreed, but noted that the motivation for this increase in solar power was mostly an economic one. Nonetheless the change towards renewables and Seichō no Ie's taking part in it was of great importance for their environmental aims and of leading by example. As my informant Ms Moriyama stated:

> There are so many other ways [of generating electricity]: solar, water power, geothermal. Ways that don't affect the human body. Because

> nuclear [waste], it really remains [for a really long time]. If we do not stop [using] nuclear energy, it will leave a bad legacy for the next generation [in the form of nuclear waste]. That is why Seichō no Ie is against nuclear energy.

Already at the entrance I had noted several information panels with glaring red numbers. Upon escaping the rain after touring the facility and seeing the roof's solar panels, my informant lamented jokingly the decrease in the day's generated electricity while looking at the glowing numbers. The information panel tracked both the generation and usage of power along with the temperature, reminding workers and visitors alike of power usage and its potential impact on the environment. In addition, waste disposal was meticulously monitored, allowing management to more easily find areas for improvement as part of the ISO (International Organization for Standardization) 14001 environmental management system which has been in place since certification for the Kyoto *kyōkabu* was gained in 2005. Seichō no Ie's "turning point", according to Mr. Matsuo at the international headquarters, "was the declaration of applying for ISO14001 while Taniguchi Masanobu was vice president in 2000, and then we got the system implemented." The work towards ISO 14001 began earlier in 2001, and Seichō no Ie was the world's first religious organizations to obtain such certification.

As part of Seichō no Ie's environmental policy, stipulated in 2000, the implementation of the ISO's environmental management system (EMS) ISO 14001 marks the earliest perceptible stage in Seichō no Ie's greening. Subsequent years were spent pursuing certification for all domestic Seichō no Ie temples, offices and *kyōkabu* in order to contribute towards their aims of becoming carbon-neutral. An EMS helps organizations improve their environmental performance through holistically identifying, managing, monitoring and controlling their environmental impacts (International Organization for Standarization n.d.). This requires a comprehensive consideration of all environmentally related issues such as air pollution, water and sewage issues, waste management, soil contamination, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and resource use and efficiency. As manufacturing and industry have a larger impact on the environment, thus naturally making up a larger part of ISO 14001 certified organizations, the adoption of the ISO 14001 standard by a religious organization marks a new crossroads for the standard. Therefore closer investigations on the motivation or effects of adopting an EMS in such a context remain unexplored. Studies largely focus rather on the benefits and implementation of the ISO 14001 in industry or manufacturing. This

research on the ISO 14001 standards in relation to these sectors, however, suggests several factors that inspire the adoption of an EMS which may also be applied to new religious movements.

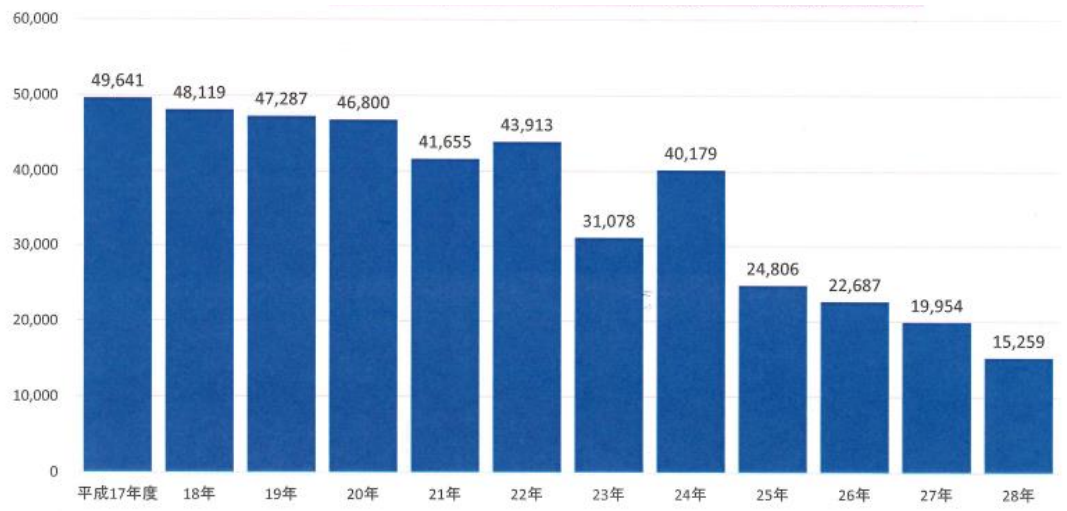

Figure 3 Annual Emission of CO^2 (kg) from 2005 - 2016. Credit: Seichō no Ie

Several scholars have found support for prevailing attitudes within an organization affecting the adoption and success of ISO 14001 while finding no support for the adoption of EMS being a sign of re-orientation towards environmental attitudes (Nakamura, Takahashi, and Vertinsky 2001, Bansal and Hunter 2003, González-Benito and González-Benito 2005, Prajogo, Tang, and Lai 2012). Extolled for their latent environmental virtues found within the new religious movement's teachings (Yoshida 2002), such findings give further credence to the idea of Seichō no Ie being a source of environmentalism with an earlier inclination towards environmental values. On the other hand, Nakamura, Takahashi, and Vertinsky (2001) and Bansal and Hunter (2003) found that organizations also sought certification due to external pressures of increased internationalization and new global markets, raising questions of external influences and how they play a role in the adoption of EMSs. Others have pointed out the benefits and consequences of adopting ISO 14001, such as increasing awareness of environmental impact of jobs and improvements in areas of waste recycling, air and waste emission reduction, material reuse, energy and water conservation (Morrow and Rondinelli 2002), or organizations valued higher for their environmental ambitions (Klassen and McLaughlin 1996). The implementation of an EMS in Seichō no Ie's case presents the opportunity for increasing environmental awareness and reducing their carbon footprint, but also for gaining recognition from other actors or potential followers, ideas that have

been adopted by other new religious movements (Dessì 2017, 144). The implementation of the environmental management system at the Kyoto *kyōkabu* exemplifies their goals of an increase in environmental awareness simply through a glance at the entrance information panels, something which also instilled a sense of pride in my informant, observable in his manner of speech, showing the importance of their efforts towards environmental conservation.

4.2 Uji Additional Main Temple

Figure 4 Uji Additional Main Temple Great hall. Credit: Marius Lian

In addition to its main temple in Nagasaki, Seichō no Ie has an Additional Main Temple in Uji. While the tour at the Kyoto *kyōkabu* had given me insights on how the ISO 14001 management system was implemented on a smaller scale, I was given the opportunity, through my contact at the Kyoto *kyōkabu*, to sit in on a meeting with ISO project members at the Uji temple located in the southern part of Kyoto prefecture. Walking along the scenic Uji River, I approached the temple by a winding road up the forested hillsides. Coined as the altar room of the entirety of Seichō no Ie, the complex

includes several shrines, halls, religious memorials and a large training hall dotted over the forested hills, and functions as the focal point for ceremonies and training.

The ISO Project Meeting is held at the Uji Temple on a semi-regular, almost monthly basis. The project members convene to look over the overall consumption so far of the calendar year in areas such as water, electricity (not locally generated) and fossil fuels. Changes, in comparison to the previous year, are then discussed, finding causes for increases or decreases, as well as discussing potential ways to further decrease the environmental impact of the Uji Temple. At this meeting an unusual increase in water consumption was discussed, with one of the attendees pointing out leaky faucets in one of the bathrooms on the grounds. The needs of a new koi pond were also mentioned as a source for this increase. In similar fashion to the Kyoto *kyōkabu* though on much a larger scale, solar panels were installed on the grounds and roofs of the temple buildings allowing for a maximum generation of 566,8 kW locally (under ideal weather circumstances). As with the consumption of resources by the temple, generated electricity was equally measured and kept track of, though differences here were more easily explained by weather variations and did therefore not draw the same amount of scrutiny as other areas.

As the ISO Project Meeting drew to a close, one of the temple's priests held a presentation to explain Seichō no Ie's ideals and view of environmental issues. I was explained that through training seminars and activities the environmental efforts of Seichō no Ie were to some degree transmitted to believers. The main tenet describing their environmental goals is "to create a new civilization where nature and humans are in great harmony" (自然と人間の大調和した新たな文明を築(きず)いていくこと *shizen to ningen no daichōwa shita aratana bunmei wo kizuite iku koto*). The way forwards to reach such a goal is summed up in the following five points, varying from principles to concrete duties:

1. There is happiness in being in harmony with nature.
2. Learning of the different links between humans and nature.
3. Deepening one's awareness of humans' interrelatedness to nature.

4. Living in a way that appreciates every moment in everyday life in a conscientious manner.

5. Living in a way that more in tune with the body (literally using your body properly)[13], thus respecting ourselves and surroundings to a higher degree.

By living a life guided by these principles, members are helping in achieving Seichō no Ie's ideal civilization, true to perceiving itself as an enlightenment movement, while living according to their founder's teachings. Seichō no Ie sees several negative aspects of our modern world as the source for our current struggles and challenges, especially the environmental one. The problem, as one of my informants put it, "[b]ecoming economically affluent are humans' first [and foremost] goal, but this isn't a goal for happiness, right?" To counter these societal maladies, Seichō no Ie provides an alternative and opposing worldview, in stark contrast to current modernity (Table 1). The resulting dichotomy summarizes the ideal and imperfect worlds in Seichō no Ie:

Spiritual/religious ideology.	Materialistic ideology.
A worldview that is centred on nature.	Belief in human superiority leading to an anthropocentric worldview.
Controlling our desires and greed.	An economy and personal drive formed by desire and greed.
Harmonic relationship between man and nature.	Human's antagonism towards nature.
A society of natural energy and use of above-earth resources.	The abuse (of our privilege) of underground energy resources.
Renewable energy sources.	Large scale production and large-scale consumption.
Distribute riches evenly, fairly and regionally.	Uneven distribution of wealth.
A view based on mental and psychological wellbeing as the source of happiness.	A view based on the pursuit of material wealth as the source of happiness.

Table 1 Dichotomy of Seichō no Ie's Ideal (left) and Current (right) World. Credit: Marius Lian

Members are encouraged to let these points form their daily lives and practices, similar to Darragh (2009) and his 'voluntary simplicity', in order to reach the second much

[13]The phrase 自分の肉体をきちんと使う (*jibun no nikutai wo kichinto tsukau*) bears meanings of using every fibre of ones being to live in a proper manner. In this context it implies living in a way that is proper to oneself, the teachings of Seichō no Ie, and those who surround you (taken here to include nature).

referred to principal of “God, Nature and humans becoming a unified whole” (神・自然・人間は本来一体なり *kami shizen ningen wa honrai ittai nari*).

Formerly, the idea of being grateful for the blessings we receive from nature and living frugally - listed as the fourth principle above - was purely centred on members and was meant as a reminder to live according to the teachings of Masaharu Taniguchi. More recently, however, the idea has become a slogan and gained a different meaning in that its scope now includes society at large, and signifies Seichō no Ie’s mission of changing one person’s life after the other in a more environmentally focused direction that is simultaneously in line with Seichō no Ie’s teachings. The phrase “to live conscientiously” (「丁寧」に生きること *teinei ni ikiru koto*) also functions as a reminder of these ideas for members, making them continuously ask themselves of how they impact nature and vice versa to inspire a way of “right living”.

Though the above mission for the most part is related to theoretical ideas, I was shown how the ideas had shaped Seichō no Ie activites and led to concrete measures. In order to lead more environmental lives, members as well as the group itself had adopted and recommended measures ranging from reducing meat consumption, eating locally (reduced food miles and rely on seasonal produce), using bikes or electric vehicles, supplementing food with home-grown vegetables and promoting the value of crafts and homemade things. Disseminating this idea of reconnecting with nature is done at the Uji Temple as part of the education of new and old members. A range of environmentally focused activities are held for all members and includes making fertilizer from organic waste, learning how to make planters with resources sourced from the surrounding forest, learning about organic gardening and raising and harvesting seeds for these purposes.

After the meeting I was shown around the temple complex. I was shown an organic tea field in the hills behind the temple complex. This is used by the temple to educate members in organic farming techniques and functions as a source for the tea consumed at the temple and offered to visiting guests. Beyond the tea field, on the crest of the hill one finds the larger field of solar panels (Figure 5) with a 300kW capacity. Not far from the Uji Additional Main Temple, and on a much grander scale, one finds the Joyo Mega Solar Plant which is the result of Seichō no Ie’s efforts to expand renewable energies

with their Renewable Energies Expansion movement[14]. Through fund raising activities done through its own webpage, member donations, and donations made at local facilities, Seichō no Ie has as of 2018 been able to fund an additional solar plant in Fukushima prefecture, with plans of constructing a geothermal power generator in Ōita prefecture. By donating to these projects, donors have the option of getting their name displayed on placards at each of these facilities as well on the project's webpage[15]. Worth noting is the lack of any mention of other collaborators, state or private, taking part in these renewable energy projects, suggesting that they are purely ventures made by Seichō no Ie.

Figure 5 Solar Panels in the hills behind the Uji Additional Main Temple. Credit: Marius Lian

The renewable energy expansion movement's goals are summed up as providing an alternative source of power in the post-Tōhoku earthquake Japan where the awareness of the dangers and downsides to nuclear energy have been greatly heightened. Other driving forces are natural disasters of increasing severity and frequency, loss of

[14] Information on Seichō no Ie's renewable energy activities and fundraising is available on its own webpage https://www.jp.seicho-no-ie.org/naturalpower/ in both Japanese and English.
[15] Many of these are individual members' donations, but a considerable amount seems to have come from Seichō no Ie's own publishing company. The finances of new religious movements are largely left unexplored and present an interesting avenue for future research.

biodiversity and increased pressure on global food production as a consequence of global warming. The movement also holds a political message and criticises current governmental policies through publications and on their websites for the government's continued dependence on both nuclear and fossil based thermal energy, portraying them as part of the "old civilization". The movement seeks to find and cooperate with like-minded groups and work towards a civilization based on renewable energies to protect nature and decrease the amount of suffering caused by an environmental crisis.

An overview of Seichō no Ie's solar power generation is available on the website of the Religious and Scholarly Eco-Initiative (http://rse-greenenergy.org/, in Japanese), an association that "aims for harmony between humans and nature and the creation of a new cultural principle[16]", and has drawn together members from various religious groups, such as Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō, and supposed academic circles, with Ryukoku University being the sole secular[17] member. The association promotes the introduction of renewable energy and, as an appeal to resolving the environmental crisis, displays the total generation of electricity from select religious facilities. In a very similar rhetoric to Seichō no Ie's Renewable Energy Expansion Movement, the Religious and Scholarly Eco-Initiative bases its raison d'etre on the issues that arose after the Tōhoku earthquake in addition to the possibility of a decentralized energy model being capable of supplying electricity when broader network infrastructures fail. The similarity between the two aforementioned groups becomes clearer when considering that the coordinator is a member of Seichō no Ie himself. While currently focusing on solar power, the additions of other renewable energy sources are intended to be added, also similar to Seichō no Ie's own plans of expanding their renewable efforts into geothermal energy.

4.3 The "Office in the Forest"

The Seichō no Ie International Headquarters, dubbed "the Office in the Forest" (森の中のオフィス *mori no naka no ofisu*), represents the focal point of Seichō no Ie's environmental activities. After the decision of relocating their head offices from Tokyo

[16] The term used, 文明原理 (*bunmei genri*) holds connotations of a principle implemented on a large scale, such as a society wide paradigm shift. As Seichō no Ie's goal is to usher in a new form or stage of society, I have chosen the more all-encompassing yet vague term of 'culture' to reflect the scope and esoteric view of the goal.
[17] Ryukoku University is secular today, although its Buddhist origins are still visible on its webpage https://www.ryukoku.ac.jp/english2/.

to Yamanashi prefecture's Yatsugatake Mountains to minimize their environmental impact, the new facility was completed on the 7th of July 2013. In attaining their lofty goal, the relocation of their headquarters resulted in the creation of an energy self-sufficient building which exceeded expectations allowing surplus energy to be sold back to the grid. The Office in the Forest thus became the first zero energy building in Japan, built from mostly local sources, with lumber approved by the Forest Stewardship Council, and supplied with electricity from solar panels and wood biomass power generators. I was invited to experience Seichō no Ie's pinnacle of eco-friendliness first-hand and, after stepping out of the electric car, one in their fleet of many, I was greeted by a party who was to guide me through the modern facility. The group consisted of my guide Mr. Kinoshita, an ordained minister of Seichō no Ie, two representatives of the PR section, who were to record my visit, and two senior members from the PR section Mr. Takagi and Mr. Matsuo (the former left and joined throughout the day as he had other business to attend to).

Figure 6 Office in the Forest. Credit: Seichō no Ie

As I had spent an extended period in urban environments lacking in greenery, the large windows that opened to the surrounding forests was a refreshing change. I was told this

was done to allow people within the building to feel closer to nature and symbolized Seichō no Ie's ideas of a deeper human-nature relationship. These sentiments also inspired the building process. As was previously mentioned, wood was chosen as material for the facility for its lower environmental impact, its local abundance and for the warm and organic feel of the material. Resources throughout construction were recycled whenever possible as part of lowering Seichō no Ie's emissions and waste and was an important part of the entire construction process and beyond. Even the bedrock removed during early phases of construction found a new use as thermal storage under the office's floors. The theme of reusing and recycling remained after completion, with the facility's greywater being reused and the same meticulous approach to recycling as seen in the Kyoto *kyōkabu*.

The cafeteria is fully equipped with electrical appliances, instead of the gas stoves commonly found in Japan. It focuses on providing around 200 meat free meals a day made mostly from local ingredients. The motivation for such a choice, as explained to me, was the environmental impact of meat production. The choice to locally source ingredients while also paying attention to the seasons was motivated by a similar rationale, by reducing the food mileage that the import of out-of-season produce from far flung places required, Seichō no Ie could further reduce their environmental impact. My informant Mrs. Moriyama in Kyoto had been inspired by these efforts made by Seichō no Ie, and payed great attention to food – mileage having adopted the idea of *chisan chishou* (地産地消 produce locally, consume locally).

The cafeteria also proved a perfect model of the current energy saving technologies implemented at the office. The larger windows and skylights helped bringing in natural lighting, thus relying less on electric lighting, but was also part of a ventilation system that allowed for breezes to naturally flow through each wing making any use of air-conditioning redundant in warmer and more humid months. In the cooler times, solar heat collectors on the roofs pumped warm air down under the floors, with the bedrock holding the heat, warming the office from below. The use of diatomaceous earth[18] on the walls controlled humidity and added insulation to the facility allowing the Office in the Forest to rely on natural heating and cooling and increased energy efficiency. This provided a stark contrast to my experiences of Japanese buildings' lack of insulation

[18] A soft sedimentary rock made up of fossilized diatoms, a type of prehistoric hard-shelled algae. Used in wall treatments for its ability to absorb toxins and control humidity, thus improving indoor air quality.

and high dependency on air-conditioning. This is also lamented by Junko Taniguchi, the wife of the current president of Seichō no Ie and head of its women's association the White Dove Society, who speaks of Tokyo's "cold summers and warm winters" due to the exaggerated use of air conditioning (Taniguchi and Taniguchi 2010). The achievements of the Office in the Forest have resulted in the creation of an environmental paragon as far as the physical office building goes, having also garnered critical acclaim domestically as well as a copious amount of environmental awards and certificates.

Similar to other Seichō no Ie facilities, but in much larger scale, the roofs were equipped with solar panels. In addition, in order to reach full energy self-sufficiency, a biomass energy system was implemented. The biomass energy system supplied electricity and heating for various purposes while using local wood as energy source, further emphasizing Seichō no Ie's wish of reducing its carbon footprint. A by-product of the biomass energy processes is charcoal and potential uses for it were under consideration at the time of my visit. Of course relying on solar power and biomass for energy, the office was only self-sufficient under ideal weather circumstances. This meant their micro-grid was not fully independent from external power sources, only under optimal conditions.

A recurring theme throughout my visit was Seichō no Ie's stance on energy. In discussions over lunch, the main senior representative from the PR section Mr. Takagi mentioned how as a religious group they were early with their environmental activities and that the Pope's encyclical *Laudato si'* further spurred them on and strengthened their belief of religion's role in environmental efforts. However, Mr. Matsuo lamented that "the pope was unclear on his stance on nuclear power", a subject Seichō no Ie has a clear stance on after the Tōhoku earthquake in 2011, which is something other Japanese religious groups have been cautious in doing (Dessì 2017, 75-79). The current president himself has explained how the use of nuclear energy is another aspect of materialism dominating modern society that disrupts the relationship between man and nature, thus criticizing the then ruling party's double standards for promoting a nuclear free society yet supporting the enterprise of nuclear expansion in Japan (Taniguchi 2012, 229-230, Dessì 2017, 81). The earthquake had far reaching consequences for the plans of the new international headquarters as it happened during a meeting for the plans for the new

headquarters. Due to the limitations of energy storage, the senior PR representative informed me during our interview that:

> we thought it acceptable to deal with Tokyo Electric Power Company[19] (for electricity), but after the [earthquake and Fukushima] accident it became clear that their way of doing things were strange, therefore we decided to think of a way of being as independent as possible and realize it. Because of [the earthquake and Fukushima accident] we completely changed our roughly decided on energy system, and decided to get bigger batteries and do things in a way that allowed us to be as self-sufficient as we could be.

Along with Seichō no Ie's own awareness, the disaster inspired the consultants and construction company involved in the project, with it "becoming something they had to do". Mr. Matsuo made a point that because of the disaster:

> …the contractors did things earnestly for us. The fact that Seichō no Ie's dream was definitely important for mankind, on top of also being important for Japan, was a big reason [for this inspiration].

The new plans turned the Office in the Forest into a physical representation of Seichō no Ie's stance on Japanese energy policies, seeing them as restrictive and unethical, which also inspired the president's book that condemns the use of nuclear energy and its dangers (Taniguchi 2012).

The future, according to the representatives of Seichō no Ie, was about renewables. They agreed that there had been an increase of solar power in Japan, but were also interested in hydro and geothermal power, the latter currently has an ongoing fundraising campaign according to Seichō no Ie's websites. The goal of renewables was also something that was being disseminated among Seichō no Ie's members, with subsidies being provided to those installing solar panels or acquiring an electric vehicle. Mr. Matsuo stated laughingly over lunch that "[i]t would be fine for people to join Seichō no Ie, if only for the monetary help", perhaps hinting that the environmental goals of Seichō no Ie could also help with increasing a waning membership. Throughout my fieldwork this only seemed to apply to one of my informants, Mrs. Kobayashi of the Ibaraki *kyōkabu*. She had always had an interest for environmental issues, though she credits her joining Seichō no Ie to an experience when she once saw

[19] Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) is in charge of the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactor and supplies power to the greater Tokyo area.

one of their publications. This remained with her and she was unsure whether this was related to her environmental concern.

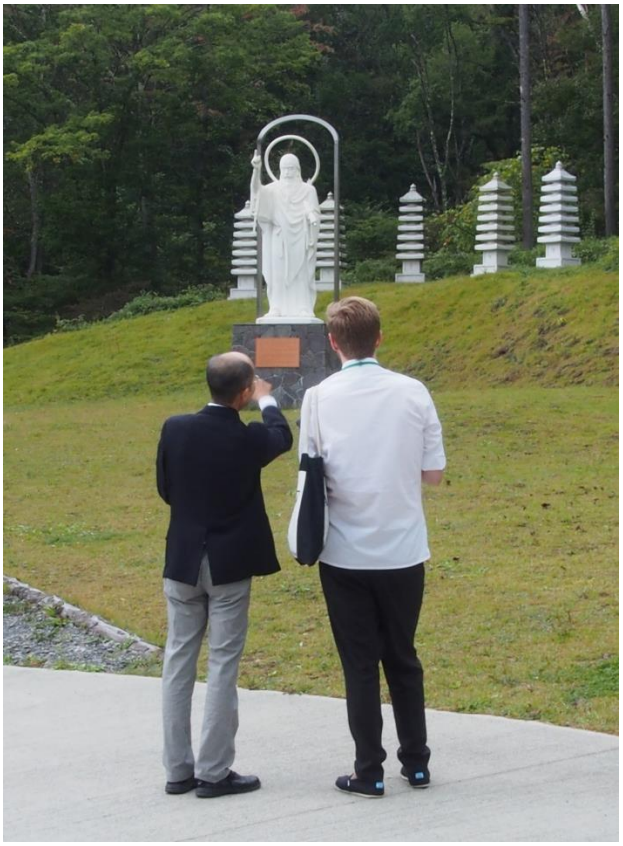

Figure 7 Square of Embracing All Religions with the statue of Lighter of Seven Candlesticks. Credit: Seichō no Ie

As my visit moved on, I was guided to the northern part of the grounds, next to the storage batteries and micro grid control centre, where one finds the Square of Embracing All Religions which is used to express the main teaching of Seichō no Ie from its founding that "all religion emanate from one Universal God" (Figure 7). Here the number seven holds symbolic value. A statue of the lighter of seven golden candlesticks, a biblical reference to the seven candlesticks in the Book of Revelation, taken by Seichō no Ie to symbolize the idea of all religions stemming from one source as each candlestick for them symbolizes a world religion. The statue, however, also has an uncanny resemblance to Seichō no Ie's founder Taniguchi Masaharu, perhaps implying that Seichō no Ie holds a unique position and exclusive access to these insights as Dessì (2017, 47-48) suggests. Another interpretation is that of Seichō no Ie's founder being equated to some messiah. Behind the statue seven story pagodas, a reference drawn from Buddhism's Lotus Sutra, mirrors Seichō no Ie's teaching in each of its seven stories:

1. **Seven religions:** All religions emanate from one universal god

2. **Seven continents:** Symbol of international peace

3. **Seven ethnic groups:** Harmony between ethnic groups

4. **Seven cultures:** Harmony between diverse cultures

5. **Seven generations:** Harmony between generations

6. **Seven lives:** Harmony among all living beings

7. **Seven missionary bases:** Harmony and expansion between the organizations and missionary bases

The idea is that the realization of these teachings will result in peaceful coexistence. In addition to the above, a sundial represents that, like a sundial showing time only when the sun is shining, Seichō no Ie calls for the recognition and expression of a bright and cheerful life. Some distance away from the main office there were smaller facilities, one being a concert hall and gallery space. My guide explained to me that this was also a part of Seichō no Ie, expressing thoughts, beliefs and feelings through art and different media. A perfect example of this in regards to the environment was a mosaic consisting of eggshells, an innovative and interesting way to use something that would otherwise go to waste. Impressed by Seichō no Ie and their environmental ambitions, I made my way back to a Tokyo lacking in greenery.

4.4 Tokyo *Kyōkabu*

The first Tokyo *kyōkabu* (Tokyo has two) is found among small and winding streets that might confuse those unfamiliar. As soon as I entered I noticed how the Tokyo *kyōkabu* was a lot livelier than the previous places I had visited. This was because the day of my visit was the day where several associations were conducting meetings, and members were around the reception area preparing for a flea market that was to be held in a few days' time to raise funds for their current renewable energy project. My visit included the usual tour of the facility including the solar panels, different rooms and their uses and garden. It was the latter that partly stood out on this visit. The garden, though small, incorporated elements of the landscape as many Japanese gardens do. My guide explained that this year they had been growing cucumbers as a way of experiencing nature's blessing first hand, reminding me of the use of organic gardening as a platform

to raise awareness of food and its relationship the environment at the Uji Additional Main Temple. The garden had also recently hosted an event where attending members had drawn or painted the scenery intended to deepen their appreciation for the natural world.

As briefly touched upon in Chapter 2, Seichō no Ie's publications play a large role in religious practice partly through *shiyūkai*, the informal study meetings. The opportunity to attend one of these later that evening presented itself during my visit at the Tokyo *kyōkabu* through one of my informants, Mr. Sugimoto, who is in charge of conducting and leading these. The young man's duties involved holding informal lectures, leading *Seinenkai* groups of a younger demographic in discussions involving Seichō no Ie publications, teachings and daily matters. That night's meeting had more people attending than usual and began with all the 14 attendees (including myself) giving a short presentation of oneself and one positive thing that had recently made you happy, true to Seichō no Ie's focus on positive thought as a source for a happy life, followed by an introductory prayer.

The topic, exemplified through the two short pieces that were read aloud and a brief talk given by the lecturer, was how one could be moved by what surrounds us in our daily lives and how this could change our habits. The tales of our lecturer's many travels during his student years served as an example of insights that could be gleaned if one broadened ones horizons through different experiences, and the potential of these to look at one's own life through new eyes. This then returned to how, in a similar fashion, Seichō no Ie through its clubs and associations provide experiences through cycling, organic gardening and crafts, allowing its members to experience the thought, energy, resources and efforts that go into otherwise ignored parts of life, fostering greater appreciation for these and, by extension, nature. The attendees were all asked to share stories of similar changes in their lives through "proper" or "right living" and join the discussion. One attendee, seemingly more experienced with Seichō no Ie, shared how the experience of cycling more had resulted in her becoming more aware of her body and grateful for her own health as well as the efforts of her parents to give her a healthy upbringing. The more longstanding members joined willingly in the discussions and shared their stories, whereas the newer converts were more hesitant. The unanimous conclusion drawn from the evening was how increased automation and efficiency

created fewer opportunities for one to experience daily life physically, something that creates a divide between ourselves, our surrounds and nature. As exchanges ceased, another brief prayer was said before the *shiyūkai* drew to a close and transformed into an informal gathering.

4.5 Ibaraki *Kyōkabu*

After the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake the former Seichō no Ie facility in Ibaraki prefecture, north-east of Tokyo, was greatly damaged. Already during my visit to Seichō no Ie's International Headquarters, I was recommended to visit in order to experience another concrete example of Seichō no Ie's work towards creating harmony between God, nature and humanity. As I approached in a non-electric car (I was later to discover that my driver did not know how to start Seichō no Ie's electric cars), I was met with a carbon copy of the Office in the Forest, though on a smaller scale. Working from earlier successes, another zero-energy building that aimed to showcase a lifestyle closer aligned with nature had been erected to create a new focal point for other Seichō no Ie facilities and members in the region.

Introductions were made before my contact at the Ibaraki *kyōkabu* Mrs. Hayashi held a presentation on Seichō no Ie's newest facility which had finished construction April 2016. This time the idea of "God, nature and humans becoming one" (神・自然・人間は一体になる *kami shizen ningen wa ittai ni naru*), another catchphrase common in Seichō no Ie, was prevalent throughout her presentation, and highlighted the importance of an environmental turn as the potential consequences for not doing so had been keenly felt after the earthquake. I could clearly see the inspiration from the Office in the Forest using similar energy saving solutions and solar power and relying on local resources mostly. However, the building had its own distinctive touches such as geothermal heating and cooling, and the plans had incorporated a video conference system to allow for broadcasting of seminars and rituals while also improving communication. The rationale was that this would allow distant members to participate without spending time traveling distances, but more importantly would also reduce the fuel necessary for such transportation. Also, as a tribute to the neighbouring town of Kasama known for its pottery and an abundance of firewood, wood stoves provided heating and discarded

pottery shards were used as thermal storage under the facility in the same way bedrock was used in the Office in the Forest.

The *kyōkabu* was dominated by its great hall (Figure 8) where ceremonies, rituals and lectures were held, a place that was "marvellous for doing *shinsōkan"* (prayerful meditation) as Mrs. Hayashi put it, since the large windows gave a view of the surrounding landscape. The facility was also quite isolated, meaning many of the workers commuted by car, as most lived nearer the former site of the office that was destroyed by the earthquake. The building was also equipped to allow people to stay over for training camps, so the facility had all necessities for visitors such as room for sleeping, eating and showering. There were a few other smaller Japanese style tatami rooms used for meditation, training or meetings and the offices had sliding walls so the space could accommodate to different needs.

Figure 8 Ibaraki *kyōkabu* Great Hall's Alter with the calligraphy for 実相 (*jissō*) meaning 'reality'. Credit: Marius Lian

It seemed the environmental focus was more pronounced here than elsewhere, but carried traces of what I had already observed during my other visits. Carbon emissions were reduced to a minimum, meat free food (fish is used) was served, and a large

organic garden, along with cycling activities and crafts, were recommended as ways of an ecological life that highlighted "being grateful for the blessings of Ibaraki's nature". While passing the organic vegetable patches of the facility Mrs. Hayashi told me of an issue that had arisen, showing the difficulty of realities not always corresponding to Seichō no Ie's ideals. A wild boar had been sighted in the area and was helping itself to the vegetables the members had painstakingly grown. A solution that "would be in harmony with nature" was up for discussion at the time of my visit, with the hopes of finding a way for the members and gardeners to peacefully coexist with the boar.

While wondering of the fate of the boar, my tour and interviews at the *kyōkabu* came to an end. As I was seated with a few members who had remained, I was given a few crafted items with the intention of me passing them on as gifts to others. These included crocheted acrylic scouring cloths used for cleaning oily dirt without harmful detergents, and bookmarks with messages such as "Let's only use air-conditioning above 28 degrees, and heating below 20 degrees", "Let's use our own bags when shopping" and "Let us reduce meat in our diets. With the grains spent on the meat industry, we could end the pain of those suffering daily from hunger", all "For a lush and green future earth!" I was then driven back to the station, this time in an electric car, as my driver had received some coaching on the matter.

The intention of the above tableaus has been to provide an introductory overview of how a green shift in Seichō no Ie is manifesting itself. Through my observations during my visits to Seichō no Ie sites, there is no doubt that Seichō no Ie is taking part in religious innovations for sustainability. As the movement's goals of a sustainable future are manifesting themselves through concrete measures in reducing their environmental impact, there are also attempts to challenge the way we interact and perceive the environment through innovative activities and calling for a larger societal shift towards more in line with nature. Managerial reforms and local initiatives are contributing to lowering the carbon footprint and reducing environmental impact of the movement on a whole, but the visit to the Uji Additonal Main Temple proved belief and teachings were changing to meet with environmental concerns. Mainly the green shift was expressed through green energy, with all of the facilities I visited using renewable energy sources to lessen their dependence on energy companies. The experience of the Tōhoku earthquake also appears to have played a role in taking environmental efforts further

and seeking independence from then current domestic energy policies focused on non-renewables as nuclear and fossil fuels due to their dubious environmental ramifications as the disaster demonstrated. Though not as explicitly stated, the effects of Seichō no Ie's greening were felt at the *shiyūkai* as the movement's activities to foster environmental awareness (among others) reached into individual members' lives, leading them to use bicycle or adopt minimalistic lifestyles. The question then becomes what is the rationale behind this all-encompassing green turn, and what can it tell us about Seichō no Ie and its framing of the environmental crisis? These are the questions dealt with in Chapter 5.

5 Analysis and Discussion

The previous chapter presented the concrete initiatives undertaken by Seichō no Ie and in doing so gave a broad idea of how the environmental crisis is understood by the new religious movement. This chapter seeks to explore the rationale behind Seichō no Ie's religious innovation for sustainability from the perspective of its adherents' narratives. I then reconstruct the cognitive framework of Seichō no Ie's relationship to the environment as inspired by frame analysis to discover their environmental agenda.

5.1 Narratives on the Greening of Seichō no Ie

The interviews below are accounts made by individuals at different levels within Seichō no Ie's hierarchy and therefore are not necessarily representative for the entirety of Seichō no Ie. However, they were selected and highlighted here as each focused and elaborated on different themes throughout their respective interviews, which revealed unique facets of Seichō no Ie that I had not considered. While there were differences in emphasis and nuances, for the most part one overarching narrative was present throughout most of the interviews, creating an overarching Seichō no Ie narrative.

During the analysis of my interviews I considered several points. I acknowledge that the informants constructed their narratives with the aim of educating me on their religion's environmental initiatives of and clarify the motivations, goals and effects related to these. As all of my informants were members of Seichō no Ie, the interviews presented an opportunity to share the informants' own view of their religion. Only during two of my interviews the informants were joined by other members, and I acknowledged that their answers might be influenced to conform to the ideas and opinions of those present. As they knew I was doing research on their organisation, my informants might also wish to paint their movement in a more positive light or other ways they would want to be perceived.

5.1.1 Meeting at the Office in the Forest

After a guided tour of Seichō no Ie's environmental bulwark, a meeting room had been prepared by my party to give me the opportunity to ask questions regarding their environmental initiatives. The meeting room had the same warm wooden panelling and

large windows opening up to the surrounding forests, as the rest of the facility. In order to present their concrete environmental measures, two representatives, Mr. Sugiyama and Mr. Matsumoto, from the *Seinenkai* (association for men and women between junior high school and their late thirties) were present to speak of the efforts made by Seichō no Ie's associations and groups to foster a deeper care for nature. I was also joined by my guide Mr. Kinoshita, an ordained minister, who sometimes functioned as a moderator during the interview, and one senior representative from the PR section, Mr. Matsuo. In addition, two members of the PR section, one a photographer and the only woman in the room, and the other taking notes, were also present to record my visit for Seichō no Ie's own purposes.

I started the interview by asking what my informants thought were the reasons for a recent greening in Seichō no Ie. The senior PR representative Mr. Matsuo stated the main goal of Seichō no Ie was the realization of world peace:

> Currently the biggest challenge [preventing us from] realizing this is the environmental problem, I think. If we don't resolve [the environmental problem], we can't achieve our first goal. That is the biggest reason I think.

The movement's environmental goals were interrelated with their peace activities, a connection made during other interviews as well. Climate change poses a potential threat towards Seichō no Ie's aims of world peace. A sustainable future becomes a pre-requisite for this goal, as not doing their part for the environment can stall or fully prevent any possibility of realizing it.

Mr. Kinoshita made the addition that as a religion they can play an ideal role in a sustainable transition:

> Also there are often questions about why a religion is involved with environmental initiatives, but solving the environmental problem is largely a matter of *kokoro*[20] (心), or rather that our *kokoro* aren't getting better, that we need to [foster] a *kokoro* that values earth becomes a fundamental cause for the environmental problem. Fundamentally solving this is difficult, but religion can properly deal with that, and if [we] don't convey these things, one has the [problem] that everyone's *kokoro* won't change.

[20] 心 *kokoro* bears the meaning of 'heart', but also 'mind' or 'spirit' and is commonly used to define one's character, the self and emotional heart rather than the organ.

Mr. Kinoshita's way of thinking is clearly defined by his role as a Seichō no Ie ordained minister. The destruction of the environment, though due to observable and very concrete acts, is according to my informant based on our individual feelings regarding the environment and ways of thinking. As touched upon in Chapter 3, religion may work as a motivator for behaviour and as source for morals, values and practices, giving the idea of religions as the environment's saviour some level of credence considering religion's earlier contributions in the abolition and human rights movements (Gottlieb 2010, 502-503, Davies 2018). But, as stated previously, even with examples of other religions professing their love for nature and denouncing environmental degradation both in Japan and elsewhere, why are we not yet at the cusp of a green religious revolution? While it is true that groups and individuals may harbour 'green' worldviews, these worldviews face tremendous difficulties without taking concrete measures. They lack broader transformational force in the face of governments or large corporations that, despite recommendations and urgent calls, continue to rely on non-renewables and fossil fuels. Japan's government poses one such example with 12 billion USD a year going to subsidies and support for fossil fuels, which raises the question if religious groups like Seichō no Ie can exert the necessary force to change this (Chen 2018).

The origins and time of Seichō no Ie's 'green turn' was not as easily agreed upon by my informants. Mr. Matsuo attributed the Seichō no Ie's environmental vigour to the current president:

> …president Taniguchi Masanobu drew attention to [the environment], since he explained why, and made the reasons for the environmental initiatives clear, the members followed and [he] decided to mobilize them, I think.

However Kinoshita added, almost as if correcting the other, that:

> Originally, there is the teaching in Seichō no Ie that has been around since our founding that says "Be grateful for all between heaven and earth" (天地一切を感謝にせよ *tenchi issai wo kansha ni seyo*) … As for why we are doing this now, many problems that up until [the 'green turn'] were not known have come forth. Around that time, a little before the initiatives, things like the dire state of the earth were scientifically [explained], amidst all that data coming out … the view that Seichō no Ie in its entirety needed to take action was a big [reason] I think.

In my informant's eyes, a specific regard for the environment was implied through teachings since the new religious movement's founding, but did not fully manifest itself until scientific data provided tangible evidence of environmental degradation and its consequences. In response, more and more members expressed their wishes for greater concerted efforts by their religious movement. At a later point towards the end of our interview, Mr. Kinoshita again acknowledged the active part played by members and attributed some of Seichō no Ie's early environmental initiatives, such as not using plastic bags or disposable chopsticks, to adherents: "first we started doing [these] different things. Realizing their importance one by one, the saving and economizing of resources came from the believers' side, many of them [at least]."

Feeling the need to better explain himself, Mr. Matsuo acknowledged the teaching his co-worker referred to, saying that the very "genes" of Seichō no Ie's environmentalism was found "in that teaching", but added that:

> [I]n the writings of our founder Taniguchi Masaharu environmental problems appear, writing that at the time when Japan had problems with pollution, this was caused by not considering life, ringing a warning bell. … Then the second president, Taniguchi Seicho, he pointed out the issues of global warming in his written work in the 90s and said this was something we needed to solve. Then in the 90s like now, Taniguchi Masanobu while he was vice president raised these things in [his] lectures and books. Members picked up on these messages and studied them…

Both these narratives acknowledge how an increase in information surrounding climate change and environmental degradation was a factor in Seichō no Ie's current eco-friendly form. This coincides with one of the factors for religious environmentalism mentioned in Chapter 3, which is a greater reliance on outside sources such as scientific data, rather than solely basing oneself on religious doctrine, as may be case in fundamentalist movements. They also provide a positive image of Seichō no Ie, one due to its teachings and the other due to its strong leadership. However, the two narratives differ in their choice of actors. Mr. Kinoshita referred to Seichō no Ie's teachings as inspiration for "living a way that is kind towards our planet" and how this led to the growth of a consensus throughout the body of Seichō no Ie, resulting in a steps towards action being taken. Mr. Matsuo's narrative highlights the educational role of Seichō no Ie's religious leaders as they tapped into the environmental zeitgeist and drew attention

to environmental problems. This portrayed the leadership as the central actors in coaxing forth an organisational transformation.

Mr. Matsuo set Seichō no Ie's turning point in 2000 when Taniguchi Masanobu during his vice presidency declared the aims of obtaining ISO14001 certification and moving towards obtaining it:

> The ISO offices in Geneva said it was rare for a religion to get certified and did the favour of covering us [in this article][21]. From that, the reason why SNI was doing this during at that time could be found in the seven promulgations of light that state how we revere life, and how we have always done so. So our modern and up-to-date approach of needing to solve this was through obtaining ISO14001.

He connected doctrine with action, seeing the adoption of an environmental management system as a concrete manifestation of ecological readings of Seichō no Ie's Seven Promulgations of Light, which state (Yoshida 2002, 41):

> 1. We resolve to transcend all religious and sectarian differences, worship life and live in accordance with the laws of life.
>
> 2. We believe that the laws governing the manifestation of life constitute the path to infinite spiritual growth and that the life within the individual is immortal.
>
> 3. We study the creative laws of life and publicize our findings so that mankind may tread the true path to infinite growth.
>
> 4. We believe that love is life's nourishment, and that prayer, words of love, and praise are the creative power of the word necessary to manifest love.
>
> 5. We believe that we children of God have infinite power and plenty within ourselves and can attain absolute freedom by freely using the creative power of the word.
>
> 6. We propagate our doctrines by writing and publishing literature filled with good words, holding classes and lectures, broadcasting on radio and television, and by various other means, so that we may improve the destiny of mankind through the creative power of good words.

[21] Just before this I was handed a printout of an article written by Yoshida (2002) published by ISO.

> 7. We conduct actual movements to conquer disease and all other afflictions of life through the right outlook on life, right living, and right education, and thereby establish heaven upon this earth.

Although vague and open to interpretation, these seven promulgations point towards Seichō no Ie's environmental initiatives in that they "worship life", focus on "spiritual growth" as opposed to economic growth, work towards "improving the destiny of mankind", and aim to "establish heaven on earth". I noted how these promulgations were only mentioned by the informants in my meeting at the Office in the Forest and never referred to again throughout my fieldwork. As it was presented, these promulgations were linked to the implementation of the ISO14001. Therefore, this information would not be commonly known, especially not among laypersons, as it concerns managerial staff, which would explain why they were only mentioned here.

During this interview, Seichō no Ie was explained to have an upper hand in achieving these goals through improvement of *kokoro*, thus fostering a way of life that is in harmony with nature and in accordance with the Seven Promulgations of Light. These sentiments were also mirrored in the office in which we all sat, along with the actions of Seichō no Ie, through their efforts to present an example of their "heaven on earth" and "improving the destiny of mankind" by means of a sustainable life. This responsibility towards nature, though espoused differently by all three presidents, appears to also have been felt among Seichō no Ie's membership base, which suggested a more complex and realistic process in ushering in a green turn. This differed from many other interviews that mostly attributed an increase in environmental awareness to the current and former president. What is clear is the compatibility between Seichō no Ie beliefs and with 'green' ideas, and how their interpretation forms the basis for the most recent ecological incarnation of the movement.

5.1.2 Interview in Ibaraki

After being hampered by a typhoon, my contact at the Ibaraki *kyōkabu* Mrs. Hayashi and I had managed to reschedule my visit. On completing the tour of the facility she allowed me some time to ask her some questions on her relationship to the environmental initiatives of Seichō no Ie. The interview took place in the hexagonal great hall from which the tour had begun, thus coming full circle on our tour. The woman sitting across the table was a confident 50 year old who was employed at the

facility and seemed to take great pride in the new building and Seichō no Ie's latest work towards sustainability (though avoiding the term itself, using phrases such as "living in harmony with nature"). Her mother was a member of Seichō no Ie, and until the age of 28 when the interviewee was stricken by a sickness she had not had much interest for the new religious movement. This became a turning point as she became interested in "learning about life" and shortly after became a member.

Being employed at the Ibaraki *kyōkabu,* there wasn't much of a distinction between Mrs. Hayashi's personal life and the matters of Seichō no Ie and "as we are instructed here, I have gotten a car that doesn't emit CO_2". The focus on humanity's effect on the environment had inspired her to adopt some of the methods communicated by Seichō no Ie, such as not buying or having too much, but stated "I'm still not able to cook meat free food; my husband isn't in Seichō no Ie you see. Because if I do he tends to say 'I want to eat meat!' … So, I eat only a little." The adoption of certain elements was met with resistance, but for the most part the environmentalism as espoused by Seichō no Ie had influenced her lifestyle to a certain degree.

When questioned on the motives for Seichō no Ie's recent green transition, Mrs. Hayashi almost interrupted me out of disagreement due to me using "recent", but stopped herself and seemed to mull it over. As she understood it, perhaps the environmental mentality in Seichō no Ie had deeper roots as Mr. Kinoshita at the Office in the Forest had explained. She responded by saying that the rationale behind the movement's environmental interest these days was driven by:

> Fossil fuels, well there is the prevention of global warming. That, and aren't we limited by energy? Limited by oil, gas… Who uses that? [And w]anting to use those causes strife. We wish to avoid that. We want to eliminate conflicts related to energy. That is why our purpose or goal is to put that one can lead comfortable lives, even without using fossil fuels, into practice.

Through the observations made in Chapter 4, especially at the Office in the Forest and its smaller iteration in the Ibaraki *kyōkabu,* such efforts are highly visible and represent concrete examples of minimizing any environmental impact related to energy production and use. The end goal, though achievable through a more environmental mind-set, was avoiding any conflict related to the struggle for resources. Mrs. Hayashi

linked this goal of peace with that of the environment when she explained why climate change had become such a large focus for Seichō no Ie:

> If one only relies on fossil fuels, global warming will continue, and in relation to that, strife will occur. One would want to avoid that, right? That is why we recommend the use of nature, which everyone has always been able to freely use originally, like solar energy and turning it into electricity.

I was explained that the world peace movement was initiated during the time of the second president Taniguchi Seichō. Seichō no Ie's interest in world peace is a common trend found throughout the new religious movements of Japan, something explored by scholars such as Kisala (1999), but its ties to the environment in Seichō no Ie stands out. With the greening of Seichō no Ie being more outwardly visible, the world peace aspect of the movement can be easy to overlook. But these two aims are related as they mutually affect each other. The idea of Seichō no Ie's goals for world peace were also mentioned during my other interviews, but mostly in passing. However, Mrs. Hayashi at the Ibaraki *kyōkabu* stood out by returning to the subject several times and speaking of it at greater length. As a world peace movement, Seichō no Ie was distanced from pacifist movements, according to her, in that:

> We don't go "Let us not go to war! Let us not go to war!" like anti-war movements. Though we aren't involved in the anti-war movement, we suggest "There is this way of doing things you know." in order to avoid the scramble for resources.

Rather than condemning and criticizing the current course towards an eco-crisis, my informant presented Seichō no Ie as taking a more positive approach, offering alternative solutions and embodying them, serving as examples of a sustainable future that is needed to achieve peace. The greatest threat against this peace was seemingly due to "the scramble for resources", as heavily referred to by Mrs. Hayashi especially, but also present during other interviews.

During several points of our interview the theme of Seichō no Ie's positive outlook was referred to, often in regards to their world peace movement:

> Since we were originally a humanity enlightenment movement, since we have originally sought to spread an enlightenment ideology to all humanity, we have had a teaching that says one should see the good in

> others, do good, and that a bright, positive way of thinking creates a bright fate. That is how it has been since the start…
>
> …Let us move forward by seeing the good points in people. Don't point out the bad points, don't say "That isn't right", rather say "That has these wonderful points, there are these good points!" Looking at those positive aspects, take them to heart and let them manifest themselves [through your actions], and spread wide. That is how we approach [the topic of] world peace.

This approach is intended to build understanding, but also serves the purpose of acknowledging one's negative aspects while focusing on the positive. This follows a common thread within Seichō no Ie doctrine that "the world exists the way we perceive it" and thus emphasises the necessity of transforming one's attitude to be harmonious, grateful and cheerful" (Staemmler 2011b, 156). These ideas are integral for fostering a peaceful coexistence, as is the aim of the world peace movement, but these sentiments are also expressed in their environmental approach. Through the focus on positive ways one can contribute towards a sustainable society, as exemplified by Seichō no Ie facilities and their suggestions for living in harmony with nature, the new religious movement is positive in its future vision of the environment. This was at least the case according to Mrs. Hayashi. This provides a refreshing counterweight to the doom and gloom prevalent in most climate predictions, and attempts to find concrete solutions.

This positive outlook on life also plays into how Seichō no Ie, as explained by Mrs. Hayashi, sees the source of environmental destruction. This is, both in Japan and elsewhere, problematized by happiness being equated with economic wealth. In the Japanese case:

> Japan was in this period, after WWII, after Japan lost WWII, Japan became very poor and was financially strained. As expected the reaction was that Japan wanted to become affluent, be comfortable. The desire to become affluent led to struggles between people and during that time a lot of nature was destroyed. That Western [idea]… can one say that? That way of thinking that humans dominated nature and it was fine to use nature spread, right?

From Mrs. Hayashi's narrative one obtained a sense that Seichō no Ie is well equipped with the correct and more positive 'toolset' for grappling with the problems of the current unsustainable mode of existence. In addition to the holistic view of humanity's role on our planet, the positive approach to life as suggested by Seichō no Ie seeks to

find happiness through means other than economic ones. It is clear from my interviewee's narrative that the use of resources to live comfortably or for pursuits of economic interests is the deep rooted problems of our age. The 'toolset' as prescribed by Seichō no Ie counters this mode of life and aims for achieving a "new civilization", suggesting a new course aimed at avoiding such conflicts for resources. In essence, the driver behind the greening of Seichō no Ie is the goal of a global peaceful coexistence, also with nature, more in line with its world peace movement, but also intertwined with the pressing matters of climate change. Also present, is the reference to a damaging mind-set being imported and from a "Western" source, something the following example suggests a solution to.

5.1.3 Interview in Tokyo

Since my contact at the first Tokyo *kyōkabu* Mr. Kimura had not been able to meet me during my first visit, he was very pleased to have the opportunity of discussing Seichō no Ie and its relationship to the environment during the second visit. Our meeting took place in the small meeting room towards the back of the *kyōkabu* that looked out at the small but highly manicured garden, which is used to educate Seichō no Ie's members on organic gardening and foster a deeper relationship with "all between heaven and the earth". My conversation partner sitting across the coffee table from me was a 75 year old man in a typical working professional's suit who had a clever smile on his face. Over the years he had been in charge of the Tokyo facility, and was now an executive who had been involved with the movement since his high school years, entering around 1967. His mother was a Seichō no Ie member, which led him to naturally enter too he explained, unlike his father who never held much interest. Personally he is faced with environmental questions in his daily life as he tries to be more environmentally friendly and his family has taken measures to reduce their environmental impact. He specifically refrains from eating meat, with its large carbon footprint, and commutes by train and walks more to avoid emissions made by cars.

When speaking of the development of an environmental Seichō no Ie consciousness, Mr. Kimura began by mentioning the move of the international headquarters to the Office in the Forest in Yamanashi prefecture and linked global warming and climate change to the convenient lives in the city. But the work of Taniguchi Masanobu to educate people of the dangers and causes of climate change were what gave shape to the

movement. He lamented the lack of nature in Tokyo, but even though there is little opportunity to "touch" nature, the city dwellers of the Tokyo *kyōkabu* are supporting the environmental goals of Seichō no Ie through other means such as saving energy and water and doing whatever one can.

What stood out, however, was how Mr. Kimura spoke more of observable changes to the climate rather than the efforts of the current president and his predecessors. While they attempted to highlight the extreme changes to the climate:

> We took those things to heart, and because of that we also began to think like that, one can really experience [the terrible state of the environment], right? The amount of typhoons increasing, winds and rain is getting more extreme, while experiencing that one felt that this really was the case.

Similarly the experience of the Tōhoku earthquake of 2011 became an example of large scale destruction of the environment worsened by human action:

> Well, I wonder if it was the scale of the earthquake, even though we have had big ones before, since the 21st century the strength of the [2011] earthquake even affected the nuclear power plant, making us realize how terrible nuclear [power] was. Because direct damage of this magnitude had not been felt recently in Japan, that earthquake opened our eyes.

While the impact of the earthquake and the ensuing tsunami was devastating, it was the radiation leaking from the damaged reactor that caused more concern and raised the question of what humans were doing to the environment and highlighted a lack of ecological concerns in our modern age and questioned our increasing demand for electrical energy.

When prompted to explain the view on nature from Seichō no Ie's perspective, Mr. Kimura drew on ideas reminiscent of those in Chapter 3 of the imagined romantic deep and reverent attitude shared by the Japanese and certain scholars. He spoke of a deep connection between nature and the Japanese people:

> Trees, water, rivers and the like, this is something that the Japanese maintain, but from long ago within those [natural phenomena], *kami*, sacredness taking the form of the force of nature one could say, *kami* imbue those [natural phenomena] with life. So, Japan's *kami* and such, since long ago, trees were likened to *kami* and payed respect…The Japanese people have maintained from long ago that *kami* could be found in the depths of nature.

This is in no way exclusive to Shinto, from which these ideas are drawn, and the explanation went on to include the Buddha as "mountains, rivers, grass, trees, all are Buddha", invoking the concept of Buddhahood in all things, and that these ideas persist to this day, or has at least had a great impact on the Japanese cultural identity. This is similar to the worldview in Seichō no Ie that states that the world, and thus nature, is an expression or manifestation (現れ *araware*) of God (or Buddha), a view inspired from its mixed beliefs. As a testimony to this, the use of the lunar calendar in agriculture and fishing becomes a tale of two natural forces being shaped by each other but also having a formative effect on human ventures since ancient times. Confronted with the question of how these ideas exist alongside a dubious Japanese environmental track record[22], Mr. Kimura, while he seemingly acknowledged past environmental damage, rather deflected the question and went on to explain:

> But long ago, the people in the countryside would for example leave a little and not harvest all wild herbs and roots [for themselves], leaving some for wild animals. "For the purpose of [the wild animals'] growth", [they would say] "let's leave some". There is that [Japanese] mind set.

It is this similar mind-set that persists in his example that followed of the tradition of preserving fish stocks by avoiding fishing during the egg-laying season, and this was an expression of a particular Japanese regard for nature in contrast to others' environmentally destructive actions.

These narratives play into the idea of Japan having a superior connection to the environment, both historically and culturally, in comparison to elsewhere, and are ideas that also appear in Seichō no Ie's publications (Taniguchi and Taniguchi 2010, 74). We again return to the debate on norms and how they affect our actions. Although drawing on these narratives and norms, as Mr Kimura did, they do not necessarily reflect reality, creating a dissonance between the often referenced Japanese love for nature and the contrasting energy policies and environmental degradation of the country, especially in the light of the disaster in Fukushima. In addition, a longing back to these idealistic mind-sets is compatible with the *nihonjinron* genre that yearns for an imagined past for the very reason of a present lacking in these ideals. While boasting of Japanese views of nature, Mr. Kimura draws on them because there is a lack of such views, again highlighting this paradoxical relationship between humans and nature.

[22] For more on Japan's environmental track record see Kagawa-Fox (2012, 40-66) and Kerr (2001, 51-76)

Unlike the suggestions of Schönfeld (2012, 170-171) which sees a commonality found in the world's pagan traditions that brings them together, my interviewee puts Japanese environmental sensibilities forward as unique and benevolent, and contrasts them with China's aggression in the Senkaku Islands dispute as well as Chinese and American greed for fishing, coal or oil resources. This point is referred to multiple times throughout our interview and seen as a source for conflict. In the above section "Western ideas" were put forth as a reason for moving towards a view in which humans dominated nature. This plays into the narrative of my informant at the Tokyo *kyōkabu.*

Something that also stood out was the references to the religious traditions that, although part of Seichō no Ie's varied beliefs are not explicitly tied to the religious movement in question and rather describe a broader Japanese cultural heritage. Returning to the points raised in Chapter 3 on motives behind the greening of religion, one can observe two elements in my informant's narrative. Firstly, cultural heritage in the form of religious and agricultural traditions are invoked to connect past with present and national identity with ecology. By presenting the stories of rural ecological wisdom or ways of living that pay particular attention to the world beyond that of humans, Mr. Kimura places Japan, and in part Japanese religion, in a global ecological debate, granting them legitimacy. Japan and its religions become a fount of ecological wisdom. These stories heavily draw inspiration from a Japanese context, if not exclusively so, and frame them as an essential part of the Japanese environmental outlook. This is similar to the Pedersen's (1995, 272) deconstruction of the religious environmentalist paradigm and Dessí's (2017, 57-58) descriptions of relativized religions, but also echoes a post war era Seichō no Ie rhetoric similar to that of right-wing nationalists about Shinto, to which they ascribe deep ecological meaning. Such a narrative places Japan and the interviewee in a position to criticize human-nature relationships elsewhere, becoming an 'Oriental mirror' and applying ideas of an imagined East to highlight a problematic West (Kalland 2008, 102). The problem at the root of the environmental crisis, according to Mr. Kimura, becomes an anthropocentrism that departs from the above Japanese sentiments:

> [I]f it's a way of living that sets only ourselves, only humans who kill a large amount of animals to eat tasty food at the centre [one speaks of], that will bring about the destruction of nature, right?

The solution is:

> [t]o become one with nature, treasuring nature and animals, a society where one lives in a way where these are able to live together…We [in Japan] harbour that sense, that belief, and on that basis we say 'let us live along *with* nature', not as an enemy, nature isn't an enemy, but should be treasured as in a mutual relationship, like siblings, right?

In this sense nature is understood as being God's creation and is something to be revered and protected as such, but nature itself is, according to Seichō no Ie, a manifestation of God. Mr. Kimura explained:

> For example, this tea cup, though it is made of minerals, is also a manifestation of God. Well, it's made by human hands, but because even this is a thing of God, we aim to cherish it [as such]. Extending from that, plants and animals even, everything is like that, everything the same God, …even we are given life by God, all this is also the life of God.

Seichō no Ie's view of a human-nature relationship, in this case, becomes that of or similar to a stewardship that also invokes a holistic idea of interconnectedness between nature and humans. These are both equally expressions or manifestations, of the divine.

In Mr. Kimura's eyes, the increasingly extreme climate along with the focus on environmental issues by the current and previous leaders are factors that spurred on the greening of Seichō no Ie. The first-hand experience of the 2011 earthquake also drew attention to a problematic relationship with nature and how the drive to fulfil human needs, in this case the need for electrical power, can have dire consequences for both humans and nature. The solution for this, according to my informant, lies in returning to holistic ideas and sensibilities inherent in a Japanese cultural tradition with the hope of rebuilding our ties with nature, which at some point were lost during Japan's economic development.

The above interactions with members of Seichō no Ie helped me understand the various ways they understand the motivations behind a greening new religious movement. Driving forces behind Seichō no Ie's 'green turn' are broadly defined through the above narratives. A blend of environmentalism inherent to Seichō no Ie doctrine, which led to calls for change from members, and the educational endeavours made by the religious leadership are offered as explanations for Seichō no Ie's new 'green' interests. Seichō no Ie's potential to touch peoples' *kokoro* is presented as its advantage in tackling the root of the environmental problem as a religion. This narrative is combined with an

imagined Japanese proclivity to revere nature through an agricultural past, a unique bond with nature, and religiosity, implying Seichō no Ie has a rightful place on the stage of global environmentalism with its supposedly appropriate cultural toolset in tackling global environmental issues. But how is the environmental crisis understood? And how can it be solved? These are the questions I explore next.

5.2 The Cognitive Framework of Seichō no Ie

The above along with the preceding chapter have given an idea of how Seichō no Ie views the environmental crisis and their role in it. I have suggested that Seichō no Ie is believed to hold the solution to environmental ills by its members and has the capacity to assist in a transition towards sustainability. The environment also becomes linked with the movement's ambitions for world peace and Seichō no Ie's initiatives seek to rectify a human-nature dissonance occurring somewhere during Japan's post-war years and economic growth. Here I delve deeper into these ideas on the source and causes for climate change as framed by Seichō no Ie's members and chart larger patterns that I observed during my interviews. I also explore how these ideas frame a possible solution for environmental issues and Seichō no Ie's role in religious innovations for sustainability.

One detail throughout my fieldwork that attracted attention was the lack of any reference to the word 'sustainability' (neither the Japanese 持続可能性 *jizokukanousei* nor the English loanword). This is most likely due to the term being a technical one, linked with academics and thus not used much elsewhere. Rather terms like "great harmony", "living along with nature" or "a life that is kind to the planet" were used to emphasize Seichō no Ie's aim to minimize their environmental impact. As a 72 year old housewife and Seichō no Ie member in Kyoto explained about living modestly: "The current policy of Seichō no Ie is to not put humans at the centre, [but] all life, all [life] is made by God and really coexists, is in harmony, so let us live and grow together." The emphasis is on a harmony between humans and nature best explained as a balance that allows both humans and the natural environment to thrive and fulfil their needs, something that is reminiscent of *Our Common Future*'s ideas on sustainable development that allows everyone, including future generations, to thrive and fulfil their needs, implying there is at least a vague connection to such a definition of sustainability

The above holistic ideas led to an increased awareness of the environment and humans' relationship to nature, thus it becomes Seichō no Ie's own vision of sustainability. The implementation of their vision was problematized in the issue between the Ibaraki *kyōkabu*'s gardeners and the wild boar, proving that ideals and the reality of their implementation are not always compatible. But these thoughts on a balance between humans and nature had also affected my Kyoto informant Mrs. Moriyama's view, who explained further how Seichō no Ie's policy had made her unable to kill any animals (or insects in this case):

> You know, now in my garden, we rent a farm plot and are growing vegetables, but bugs come as well. For the reason [of Seichō no Ie's policy], I don't use any pesticides. Because if you use things like pesticides, the soil dies you know? The microorganisms die right? The soil becomes void of life. I recently came to understand this, although there are many things I still don't know.

Throughout interviews there was a pervasive idea of a similar worldview, one's own actions changing due to being either inspired by Seichō no Ie teachings or the recent efforts made by the religious movement. The main aim of these efforts is framed as a restoration or implementation of a balance between humans and nature. The only hint of sustainability in regards to leaving nature and earth for posterity, however, were the environmental messages "For a lush and green future earth!" found on the bookmarks I received at the Ibaraki *kyōkabu,* and wasn't something that otherwise appeared during conversations.

Seichō no Ie's view of nature becomes one that is deeply intertwined with their perception of God. Mr. Sugimoto, a 26 year old employee in the Tokyo *kyōkabu*'s secretariat, explained:

> For example bees don't collect nectar for themselves, but they are moving the pollen of these flowers so that the flowers thrive, or once plants have finished growing, they return to the earth so that other flowers may thrive… These aren't just the laws of nature, God is keeping us alive, imbuing everything with life, these are the things that form the basis of the idea of living in harmony [with nature], I think. All these different 'balances', are something that was granted by God, that's why we as well should not interfere with nature, in this manner it becomes necessary to take care of nature. So in that nature you can find a myriad of gods, you can see the workings of God.

Nature is seen as a manifestation and expression of God and His will. According to Seichō no Ie doctrine, the view is utopian as nature is regarded as already being in "balance" and perfect, therefore human interference becomes unnecessary and Seichō no Ie perceives nature as something that needs to be protected from such interference as it may upset such an inherently perfect natural state. Seichō no Ie's cosmology becomes holistic in that humans and nature are similarly considered as parts of God, as the 48 year old Mrs. Kobayashi in Ibaraki explained:

> Simply put, if you ask how Seichō no Ie views nature, nature equals God, right? That's because it's said that humans are children of God, …humans are a part of nature since nature is God, and we are children of God, [it's all a manifestation of] the life of God, that's Seichō no Ie's view of nature.

Seichō no Ie's cosmology that sees the world and humans as inherently perfect since they are both expressions of God, also equates them, setting neither above the other. These thoughts are combined with the environmental ills of our modern age where humanity is set above nature in that solving modern problems becomes a necessity in order to reinstate the Seichō no Ie understanding of a cosmological order and harmony.

How then does Seichō no Ie frame the problems that pose a hindrance to achieving such a holistic "great harmony with nature"? Mrs. Kobayashi charted out how earlier Japanese holistic ideas and values were forsaken for the current dominant anthropocentric view that now steers us towards environmental destruction:

> Really, that ancient Shinto where one believed Gods dwelled in nature is something that has always been nurtured in the Japanese [people]'s hearts, I think. But by focusing on economic development the thought that we should use nature for our own sakes became common, that was probably influenced by the importation of that Christian Western way of thought I think, but that resulted in things like important forests and environments being lost, living that life, it gradually aggravates [the environmental problem], pollution happens, recently it's gotten hotter, climate changes unlike we've seen till now, right?

My informant raises three points: Firstly, she relies on a Japanese cultural heritage as a basis for an inherent eco-awareness that reveres and respects nature, but is forgotten or left in the back of one's mind. Secondly, Japan's economic development in the post-war period is understood as the cause for a spreading anthropocentrism that seeks to use nature and its resources for the benefit of humanity. And thirdly, the anthropocentric

mind-set, here also linked to imported Christian or Western ideas in contrast to the first point, is seen as the source for environmental destruction and creating lifestyles that have brought on climate change, and perhaps caused a rift between 'the old' and 'the new'.

Several other interviews corroborated the above. Mr. Takeda, a senior member in the Tokyo *kyōkabu*'s administration, gave a similar explanation for the hegemonic anthropocentrism, but added materialism as an additional problem:

> …the economic development and the growing greed that came with it, led to the destruction of mountains and taking what minerals one could for example, that way of life that takes became the norm, the times as well [played a part]. Currently going [along] like this, can the things we gain and take [truly] make us happy?

My contact at the Ibaraki facility Mrs. Hayashi also highlighted the economic boom of Japan as the source for our environmental problems:

> The idea that economic wealth equals happiness [became the norm]. Japan, in this period after the war, [after Japan] lost WWII and became poor, [that was] a really difficult time. As a reaction to that of course Japan wanted to become wealthy, be comfortable, [it was] a time where everyone scrambled to fulfil their desire of becoming affluent. Nature was severely damaged then. The western [idea], if one can call it that, the way of thinking that it was fine for humans to dominate and use nature spread.

Mr. Matsuo at the Office in the Forest also pointed to industrial and economic growth as the source for human avarice:

> The technical society of now came creeping from the industrial revolution. From that we came to rely upon those resources, relying on oil, iron ore, uranium, and from that we received many graces. Upon achieving such a society, people's consciousness changed to the idea of nature as an endless supply of materials, taking what one needed, giving our desires precedence, achieving whatever we wanted and caring more for individualism. Or [take] the uneven distribution of wealth, with the increasing gap between the rich and poor - well the cynic in me appeared. I think [the above] is a problem of awareness. How do those people's lives become, through increased efficiency, automation and energy saving? …the pursuit of convenience is what [the problem] is. The consequence of that, looking at food, has been an increase in meat consumption and the appearance of imported products, and that leads again to more food being

> wasted I think. If you think about energy, we have nuclear power, as well as mass consumption and production. This brought about certain lifestyles. Then considering the immediate environment for humans, it has become mostly [dominated] by the city. All over the world over 50% of people live in urban areas, that's the state we are in.

Economic and industrial developments are problematized for their connection to materialism and anthropocentrism. Returning to the dichotomy presented at the Uji Additional Main Temple, the main issues in our environmentally precarious age (what the dichotomy considers to be the "imperfect world"), according to Seichō no Ie, are based on the preponderance for materialism as a source for happiness, as opposed to one of personal and spiritual wellbeing, and destructive anthropocentrism, as opposed to the aim of a "grand harmony with nature". As the current president himself puts it, the destruction of our environment is linked with our daily lives, how we eat, live and dress are "sponsored" by the destruction of nature (Taniguchi and Taniguchi 2010, 29-30). The solution seems to lie in ideas similar to the "voluntary simplicity" of Darragh (2009), Seichō no Ie is calling for restraint through its activities and initiatives. There was hope to be found, as the 75 year old executive Mr. Kimura at the Tokyo *kyōkabu* explained amidst his grief for the lack of nature in the city:

> If you're in the city one doesn't readily feel this connection [with nature], but by going to the countryside, into nature, perhaps one realizes that trees, rivers and mountains are [all] connected to us.

The move of the international headquarters was fuelled by the problematic disassociation with nature and the ideas expressed above. As Mr. Takeda at the Tokyo *kyōkabu* explained, life in Tokyo made being environmentally friendly difficult, as one relies on Tokyo Electric Power Company: "This office's power relies on that from Fukushima, solar panels are being put on the houses there, we are doing the same [here], it's not easy, but [at least] it's moving in that direction." An example made by the current president's wife and head of the women's association Taniguchi Junko is that of "cold summers and warm winters" (Taniguchi and Taniguchi 2010, 79-84). The (at times extreme) reliance on air conditioning to heat during winter and cool during summers symbolizes the endless desire of humans that the city with its comfort and ease is a representation of. She expands on this by providing examples of misery in the city through urbanization, stress from the daily grind, packed trains and high suicide rates. The move to Yamanashi, and the construction of the new Ibaraki building, serves as

examples of an alternative mode of life that works to reinstate Seichō no Ie's vision of harmony between human and nature through religious innovation. This alternative challenges dominant ideas in society regarding energy policies and consumption patterns, much in the way Wilfred (2009, 46) defines religious environmentalism.

Seichō no Ie's antithesis to society's maladies becomes "to create a new civilization where nature and humans are in great harmony". Mrs. Kobayashi in Ibaraki explained that this served as a slogan for members by "[turning away from] the [hegemonic] values up till now: the values that prioritise economy, things, materialism, and elevates humanity spiritually, or on a spiritual level." As I have shown these aims are expressed through energy initiatives to decrease dependency on non-renewable energy sources. This proved to be the most visible aspect of Seichō no Ie's green transition. Apart from the publications from the president himself (Taniguchi 2012) where he condemns the use of non-renewable energy sources, the most circulated magazine *Inochi no wa* has also recently expressed Seichō no Ie's opinions regarding energy. In an interview with an assistant professor at Kyoto University, the readers are explained the workings behind nuclear energy, how the Fukushima disaster happened, concluding that, considering the vast amount of living beings on earth, humanity ought to think thoroughly of their energy use (Kanauchi 2017). Other volumes of *Inochi no wa* follow a similar rhetoric such as special editions on "Zero Nuclear is the Way for a Reformed Japan" in their August edition (Seichō no Ie 2017a). This, along with the adoption of an environmental management system, simple steps supported by Seichō no Ie, its associations, and its individual members to lessen their environmental impact, further emphasise Seichō no Ie's goals. This includes use of electric vehicles, refraining from eating meat, and saving energy and resources inspired by the teachings and example of Seichō no Ie on an organizational level.

As the ordained minister Mr. Kinoshita at the Office in the Forest explained, Seichō no Ie is understood as having an advantage when it comes to tackling environmental problems since the problems are connected to our *kokoro.* Mr Takeda who I interviewed in Tokyo spoke of another affinity Seichō no Ie shared with the Japanese regarding their holistic vision:

> Since we [in Japan] have the ideas and traditions of Shinto as a base, [Seichō no Ie's] ideas can even reach those who aren't Seichō no Ie

> members. Those who aren't members even hold these ideas [of reverence towards nature]. "*Itadakimasu*[23]*"* for example, that base of true gratitude, even at the many shrines, with these [sentiments] we have a strong basis.

Seichō no Ie is not only well equipped to solve the deep rooted problems of peoples' *kokoro,* but are also highly compatible with all of Japan as they share a similar idea to those found in Japanese cultural heritage.

Seichō no Ie seems to be poised to solve environmental issues as presented in this chapter, but what means are employed to convey Seichō no Ie's message? On the topic of "right living", Mr. Matsuo at Seichō no Ie's headquarters phrased the central challenge of living in harmony with nature:

> …in our current times, people are pursuing increased automation, energy saving and efficiency. Air-conditioning heats, cars let one travel anywhere. However, we are really putting more labour into the things we do. If you don't ride a bike and go by car, you can travel without using one's body. Trying to do even tiresome things is important. Since we have come to not do these tiresome things, we are regrettably moving away from nature. So by doing those things, like going to the fields and harvesting crops, one can really feel the blessings of nature, I think.

The solution to our estrangement from nature is, according to Seichō no Ie through its initiatives and narratives, to experience nature. Taylor (2010, 20) when writing about beat poet Gary Snyder and how he attributed his ties with nature to his childhood days spent in the forest, asks "if Animism[24] is best kindled in childhood through ready access to nature, as it was for Snyder, then how in an increasingly urbanized world can this life-saving perception be encouraged?" Snyder's answer, he explains, is going back to the land and through that, rediscovering affective connections to nature, something that is echoed in Seichō no Ie's approach to re-engaging with nature. Taylor also presents other eminent figures that embrace a similar mentality that necessitates the experience of nature in fostering a love of nature, including Jane Goodall, James Lovelock and Rachel Carson (ibid. 2010, 27, 37, ibid. 2016, 284). The theme of experiencing nature runs as a red thread throughout Seichō no Ie's greening. Taniguchi Masanobu believes experiencing nature first-hand is necessary in order to truly appreciate it and understand humans' proper place in it (Taniguchi and Taniguchi 2010, 22-23). With the leader of

[23] An expression of gratitude said before meals, can be likened to "bon appétit" or saying grace.
[24] The term 'animism' here is used in a similar fashion to Schönfeld's (2012, 169) 'paganism'.

Seichō no Ie taking such a stance, it is unsurprising that these were ideas commonly referred to throughout almost all of my interviews, such as the above quote of my informant that explained how "one can really feel the blessings of nature" by harvesting crops. On the topic of Seichō no Ie's end goal, Mr. Matsuo continued:

> When it comes to lifestyle and how that will be [in the future], think of what the associations are doing, but also the changing lifestyles of our office workers. In one word, it's to change towards using our bodies properly. Like riding bikes, making things, activities that you might think are tiresome, but really treasuring the things that have been made, to realize this …we created the three clubs, and they are doing their thing. When talking of the physical environment, …leaving the city to live in the forest in harmony with nature, surrounding oneself with nature, one is [better] able to connect with it, which is sorely needed, I think.

The concerted efforts towards rediscovering human-nature connections takes form in Seichō no Ie's three clubs: the cycling club, organic farming club and crafts club. During my interview at the Office in the Forest two men representing the *Seinenkai* were present to explain the associations' and clubs' functions in a green transition. The main representative Mr. Sugiyama explained that:

> The cycling is a way of criticizing the emphasis on transportation by car and suggesting one try biking instead. The crafting club is to show that even though we can easily acquire cheap things, we have 100yen shops right, buying things there and then immediately throwing them out, since we live in a buy and throw culture, we can stop that, and we propose one can easily make things oneself and teach this [to members of the club]. The organic gardening club, though not saying one needs to aim for complete self-sufficiency, is a gentle nudge to at least grow a little [food] on our own. We are suggesting [through these clubs] that you try to change your life. These on the one hand all have each their way of contributing towards lowered energy use, on the other I think they have an influence on our *kokoro*.

Similar activities have been presented earlier, such as the gardening at the Additional Main Temple in Uji and at the Ibaraki *kyōkabu*, and the reference made to cycling in the *shiyūkai* and how it led to a change of heart for Mr. Sugimoto. Most of my interviews either directly referenced the clubs or indirectly by speaking of participating in activities or habits that the clubs promote. The aims of these activities are to transform habits and

ways of thinking, or in the words of my informants, *kokoro.* Mr. Sugiyama from the *Seinenkai* went on explain the transformative power of clubs and their activitites:

> For example, if you bike through nature you can feel unity with nature, it feels good right? Especially so in the mountains of Yamanashi. Through such a raised awareness we think of how we are [physically] human and become more aware of how we are connected with bigger things, this awareness broadens [one's mind]. From that, organic gardening becomes easy to understand; one is able to experience the blessings of nature.
>
> In a similar way, if one learns to make things in the craft club or such, one cultivates a *kokoro* that treasures objects more I think. Because one starts thinking of how someone made great effort to create something, one starts to appreciate [the object] and realize how valuable surrounding things are [as well]. While also contributing towards solving environmental problems, I think it also becomes an opportunity to deepen faith.

The goal of these clubs is to offer the chance to experience a closer connection to nature and thus proactively help the environment, something he felt often was misunderstood as simply being a "social gathering with little aim or direction."

Many interviews contain testimonials that ascribe their deepened connection to nature through these club activities. The PR representative Mr. Matsuo at the Office in the Forest said:

> if one tries [different things], there are so many interesting things to discover. …raising vegetables, if you grow cucumbers, you feel a sense of awe. At first I didn't understand this, but by actually starting and participating in those activities, I was still in Tokyo at the time, I created the opportunity to do [these things] and it had a great effect, becoming a great experience. Moreover it was good for the environment, a got into a good flow I think. Climbing the hills on bike was at first really hard. But doing it over and over, I came to be able to feel that my body is also a blessing of nature. If one doesn't try, there are many aspects one doesn't understand.

Mr. Takeda of the Tokyo *kyōkabu*'s administration spoke similarly of cycling:

> …while riding you really (pauses) By trying it, trying to change, you don't understand the importance of it unless you try. Even by doing the smallest things your will, there are many things that don't really use it like this. Your body, things you don't notice, scenery, "Wow, there are all these things!" you think and realize.

Mrs. Moriyama in Kyoto spoke of gardening and cooking without meat to counter the large carbon footprint related to the importation and production of food, inspired by the efforts of Seichō no Ie and its members. Mr. Kimura in Tokyo spoke of how crafts had inspired members: "Things like clothes, old kimonos and such that is no longer of use is recycled and made into simple clothing and different things. People are doing that."

The publications for the different associations contain similar inspirational stories of new connections between nature and life. In a magazine associated with the women's association *Shirohato* one can find recipes for meat-free dishes in its monthly *Recipes from the Office in the Forest*, or "Learn the truly important things in life by distancing yourself from a high production high consumption society and look at crafts. Find hints for leading a happy and a peaceful heart through crafts" in its monthly crafts section *Make, Pray, Everyday Life* (Seichō no Ie 2017b, 42,43). An article in the same magazine showcases the ecological lifestyle of one of Seichō no Ie's members that involves her teaching about the environment to others, growing her own organic vegetables, and adopting energy saving technologies in her home (Nanno 2017, 46-47). In an edition of *Hidokei 24*, the magazine targeted at Seichō no Ie's younger demographic, a small article speaks of how living a low carbon lifestyle can help those afflicted by climate change, whereas the common theme of experiencing nature through cycling is presented in a piece by Taniguchi Junko as she revels in the increase of cyclists in New York during her latest visit there (Shindō 2017, 19, Tanuguchi 2017, 20-23). *Inochi no wa* comes with similar editorials and monthly reports of ecological activities at the Office in the Forest.

The above discussion creates an image that Seichō no Ie is slowly moving towards their environmental goals. However, testimonials or signs of this happening beyond the scope of the new religious movement are far and few between and only visible when working in collaboration with local communities, which raises the question of how effective these efforts are on a grander scale. In this chapter I have presented possible driving forces behind the greening of Seichō no Ie through the narratives of the members I interviewed. While difficult to pinpoint, the greening is a result of internal responses to climate change and environmental disasters, a response also driven by a combination of leadership within Seichō no Ie and increasing external discussions on environmental issues. Among the informants there is a consensus of the economic development during

the post-war years created a rift between humans and nature as economic wealth and superiority over nature came to define humans. A sense of cultural superiority and belief that the new religious movement is well equipped to deal with the oncoming environmental challenges, as Seichō no Ie's cognitive framework defines them, are also factors that reinforce this latest green transformation. Seichō no Ie's religious innovation for sustainability lies in its concerted efforts to change *kokoro* through its various clubs and publications, linking environmental problems to what they define "the old civilization", and present their ideas of cosmology, teachings, and adoption of technical and managerial solutions as the answer for attaining a "new civilization" and sustainable future. The question if faith really can move mountains and assist in this transition as Seichō no Ie desires remains. While effective in rallying its own adherents, Seichō no Ie's activities have yet to rally the rest of Japan. How effective the latest transformation of the movement will be in the face of climate change remains to be seen, along with Seichō no Ie's future developments and continued 'greening'.

6 Conclusions

Figure 9 Seichō no Ie's Grove of Life with the Tower of Light in the background. Credit: Marius Lian

Located in Tokyo close to Meiji shrine, Seichō no Ie created the "Grove of Life" (いのちの樹林 *Inochi no jurin*) a park in the middle of Harajuku's urban environment (Figure 9). It was completed in 2015 after the tearing down of four out of the five buildings that originally served as Seichō no Ie's international headquarters. Mr. Takeda in the Tokyo *kyōkabu*, when speaking of the Grove of Life, explained how friends of his were "wondering why [Seichō no Ie] did not sell the plot as they could make so much money. But not doing so bears a great message, I think. Seichō no Ie's aims and message are truly summarized there I think." When entering the gate, one is greeted by a lush park that slopes downwards so that one is eventually completely embraced by greenery, although one could still hear traffic somewhere close by and see some high rises above the tree tops. Since such greenery is relatively rare in central Tokyo, the

space allows for much needed forest bathing (森林浴 *shinrinyoku*) and provides a reprieve from the otherwise stressful urban environments we inhabit. I was alone in this green oasis in the middle of a bustling Tokyo. The only people there were the gardeners working away and an elderly pair that passed through the garden, whether to visit the sole Seichō no Ie building, or simply pass through, I did not know as they disappeared behind the foliage. As I noticed no one other than the couple I had seen minutes ago pass through the grove, I wondered if the lack of people signalled that Seichō no Ie's call for Tokyo's urban dwellers to reconnect with nature went unheard among the urbanites' hectic and convenient city lives. This sentiment was interrupted, however, as I was assailed by a swarm of mosquitoes that forced me to flee the scene.

With the question of how successful Seichō no Ie's initiatives have been on a larger scale still in mind, I have throughout this thesis sought to answer what steps Seichō no Ie has taken to contribute towards a sustainable future, what the driving forces behind this transition are, and how Seichō no Ie frames the environmental crisis through discussions, initiatives and publications. This leaves other aspects within Seichō no Ie unexplored, areas that go beyond the scope of a master's thesis. The effectiveness of Seichō no Ie's initiatives beyond the scope of Seichō no Ie is difficult to gauge, raising the questions whether the environmental initiatives will truly usher in a sustainable future, or if this is simply wishful thinking. With the movement's greatest environmental achievements being so recent, their effects may prove a fruitful avenue for future research. Similarly of interest, is how this transformation will affect Seichō no Ie over time and how they will move forward and engage with issues relating to Japan's energy policy. As implied by Mr. Matsuo at the international headquarters, one wonders if the new environmental interest will also lead to an increase in new devotees or better relativizes the movement as they engage in broader social issues.

In Chapter 2 I began by presenting terms encountered in the study of new religions as well as a necessary historic background for Japanese new religious movements, followed by the historic development of Seichō no Ie. This highlighted Seichō no Ie's chameleon-like ability to adapt whenever the situation required so, leading one to question what drives their latest 'green' transformation, especially considering its more conservative past. However, Seichō no Ie's keen ability to transform and 'evolutionary

fitness' can also be regarded as a strength in the coming challenges of climate, as well as societal, change.

Chapter 3 presented the larger debate surrounding religion and the environment, and how this has initiated a broader process of religious innovations for sustainability. I then explored and critiqued how Eastern religious tradition has been framed as better equipped to deal with environmental issues, raising how this wishful and selective thinking can be problematized, and that other external and more compelling factors may play a part in the greening of religions, especially so in the case of Seichō no Ie and similar Japanese religious movements. While such factors do not exclude eco-friendly intentions, they illuminate the complexity of greening and the forces behind religious innovation for sustainability. Religion as a moral compass in dealing with climate change was also raised, with religious ethics' ability to affect norms often invoked as an integral part in a green future. As I have argued, however, norms have a limited capacity to alter environmentally destructive or other behaviours, functioning only as a moral compass. On the other hand it is difficult to ignore religions' roles in greater social transitions such as the abolition or human rights movements, which imply that appealing to our moral senses may still contribute towards creating a sustainable future. Effectively connecting religion and the environment in this way will be the greatest challenge for religious environmentalism.

In Chapter 4 Seichō no Ie's initiatives to minimize their environmental impact was described through my observations during fieldwork at several Seichō no Ie locations. While highlighting how a greening in Seichō no Ie is manifesting itself through its managerial reforms and energy policies, it also shed light on Seichō no Ie's idea of an "ideal world", and hinted at how they problematize modernity through their teachings and what they see as environmental solutions. The Tōhoku earthquake also drew the new religious movement into the debate on Japanese energy policy and nuclear energy, with Seichō no Ie attempting to lead by example and prove a low-emission lifestyle is achievable in its new international headquarters and new Ibaraki *kyōkabu.* Seichō no Ie's green shift is most visible through their adoption of renewable energy solutions and work towards expansion of renewables. The activities at the Tokyo *kyōkabu* also illuminated how Seichō no Ie's associations try to grapple with human-nature

relationships through better engaging with the environment through activities such as cycling and organic gardening.

Chapter 5 first explores my informants' narratives and how they describe the process of Seichō no Ie's greening with the aim of understanding what they see as the driving forces behind this transition. These are complex and understood as a combination of observable changes to the environment, increased access to scientific data, an active membership base and educational endeavours made by religious leadership. The environmental crisis is understood as a result of rapid economic development that defines nature as a source for human resources and has led to a pursuit of wealth, automation and convenience, ultimately creating a life that equates wealth with happiness and has created a rift between human and nature. Seichō no Ie is presented as holding the correct innovative 'toolset' to combat this regrettable development, due to its own founders' teachings, the ability to change *kokoro* (hearts or minds) and a common Japanese cultural heritage being innovatively applied to the eco-crisis. Although the common Japanese reverence for nature is difficult to see in bleak concrete jungles such as Tokyo, and stand in stark contrast to a history of Japanese environmental destruction, these imagined strengths are what will, at least in Seichō no Ie's terms, usher in a civilization in which "human, nature and God are in great harmony". To reach this lofty goal re-engaging or re-connecting with "the blessings of nature" through club activities that open one's eyes, as my informants described, are put forth as the solution of mending a broken relationship between humans and nature.

What this study has shown is that there are ripples running through the Japanese religious world and adds to the discussion on religion and the environment, both in Japan and elsewhere. Further inquiry into how religions are dealing with the environmental crisis is of great interest as many Japanese new religious movements remain unexplored and this study has only shed light on one of them. The green God of Seichō no Ie, or rather the all-encompassing manifestation of their God, is but one example of many religious innovations for sustainability.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

A Background

1. 何年に生まれましたか。
   (What year were you born?)
2. 出身地はどこですか。
   (Where are you from?)
3. ご職業は…？
   (And what about occupation?)
   a. 職業はなんですか。
      (What is your occupation?)
4. 生長の家とどのような関係ありますか。
   (How are you related to Seichō no Ie?)
   a. いつ入会しましたか?
      (When did you become a member?)
   b. 何のきっかけで入会しましたか。
      (What inspired your joining?)
   c. 生長の家の活動や組織などに参加しますか?
      (Do you participate in Seichō no Ie activities or its associations?)
      i. 環境問題のテーマは出ますか。
         (Does the environment ever come up as a topic?)

B Main questions

1. 過去数年間環境問題は人々の注目の的となりました。環境問題についてどのような考えや気持ちがありますか。
   (A few years ago environmental problems became the centre of attention. Regarding environmental problems, what are your thoughts or feelings on the matter?)
   a. なぜそのエコな生活を心がけたいですか。
      (Why would you adopt an eco-friendly lifestyle?)

2. 2000年から生長の家は全国の事業所で環境マネジメントシステムの規格（ISO 14001）の認証を取得して、2007年から「炭素ゼロ」の運動を取り組んでいます。これは二つの環境保全の取り組みの例です。生長の家は前よりこのように環境への取り組みをやっているのは個人的になぜだと思いますか。

   (Since 2000 Seichō no Ie has attained certification for the ISO14001 environmental management in all its facilities across Japan, and since 2007 working as a “Zero Carbon” movement. These are only two examples of environmental initiatives. Why do you think that Seichō no Ie is more involved in environmental initiatives recently?)

   a. 森の中へ行こうという考えについてどうと思いますか。生長の家が森の中へ行ったのはなぜだと思いますか。

      (What do you think about the idea of “moving to the forest”? Why did Seichō no Ie make this move?)

   b. 最近の環境への取り組みは三代目の総裁と関係があると思いますか。

      (Do you think the recent initiatives are linked to the third and current president?)

      i. 自然環境は生長の家の総裁はどの点で違っていますか。

         (Regarding the natural environment, at what points do the three presidents differ?)

   c. 福島第一原子力発電所事故は生長の家の自然エネルギー方針とどんな関係があると思いますか。

      (How do you think the accident at the Fukushima nuclear reactor is linked to Seichō no Ie’s renewable energy policy?)

   d. 生長の家の平和や教化の運動は環境運動とどのような関係があると思いますか。

      (How do you think Seichō no Ie’s peace and enlightenment focused movements (among other things) are linked to the environmental ones?)

3. 生長の家の自然観はどうですか。

   (What is Seichō no Ie’s view of the environment?)

a. 生長の家の教えでもっとエコな生活を心がけようという表現があります。一つは「ていねい」に味わって生きることであり、具体的にこれはどのような生き方ですか。

(There are slogans or teachings in Seichō no Ie that call for living more eco-friendly. One is “to live conscientiously”. Concretely speaking, what way of living is this?)

i. 谷口雅春(まさはる)からの教えですか。

(Is this something derived from the founder Taniguchi Masaharu?)

b. 神・自然・人間は一体なり！とは…

(Then what about “God, nature and humans becoming one”…?)

4. 欧米に宗教は自然環境が人類のために作られたものだと言いますが、日本で自然環境に対する意見はそれと異なると思いますか。何の点で異なりますか。

(In the West religion mentions that nature is made for humans’ sake, but in Japan do you think the view on nature differs? If yes, how so?)

5. 生長の家は自然が神様や仏様の命の表れと言うから、自然環境を尊敬する教団です。同じように自然環境を尊敬する宗教や信仰がありますが、このような考え方があっても環境破壊(はかい)はまだ問題です。これはなぜだと思いますか。

(In Seichō no Ie since one says that “nature is a manifestation of God or the Buddha” it seems like a religious group that respects nature. Even though there are religions or adherents that similarly respect nature, environmental destruction is still an issue. Why do you think this is?)

a. 生長の家はこれを変える力を持っていると思いますか。

(Do you think Seichō no Ie has the power to change this?)

b. 生長の家のねらいは「自然と人間の大調和した新たな文明を築いていく」と言えますが、そのような文明は生長の家によると具体的にどんな文明ですか。

(Seichō no Ie's goal is "building a new civilization where nature and humans are in great harmony", but according to Seichō no Ie, what kind of civilization is this concretely?)

c. 現在の社会や都会生活では人間優先の考え方などの負の特徴があって、生長の家はどのようにこの問題を解決できると思いますか。
(Today's society and life in the cities are characterised by anthropocentric way of thinking. How do you think Seichō no Ie can resolve this problem?)

    i. 個人の自然観をどのように変えられますか。
    (How can Seichō no Ie change individuals' view of nature?)

C End of interview

1. 話したことの上、何か言いたいことがありますか。
(In addition to what you've said, is there anything you would like to add?)
2. インタビューの印象はどうですか?
(What are your impressions of the interview?)