Southeast Asia in Japan's Spiritual Market:
The Sacralization of Exoticism

Ioannis Gaitanidis*

[*Abstract*]

From the migrant care-workers arriving in Japan from the Philippines and Indonesia to support the depleted social support system for the large population of the elderly (Ogawa 2012) to the increasing number of retiring Japanese embarking on long-stay tourism in Malaysia (Ono 2015), the Japanese image of Southeast Asia as an exotic destination offering cheap labor in return for official development assistance seems to be fading away. Yet these changes are not necessarily reflected in the way contemporary Japanese, especially those who belong to the global, "spiritual-but not-religious" (Fuller 2001) population, think of and "consume" Southeast Asia in their daily lives. Using three case-studies, spiritual tours, Thai massage, and an NGO founded by a Japanese spiritual therapist, this paper argues that in Japan's large spiritual market, which targets people seeking alternative ways to express their religiosity, the old-fashioned colonial exoticism of Southeast Asian narratives were integrated in a totalizing discourse, in which Japan remains the exceptional outlier (Tanaka 1993), a country still claimed to be "advanced" both spiritually and economically.

* College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Chiba University, Japan / gaitanidis@chiba-u.jp

Keywords: Spiritual Tourism, Power Spots, Japan, New Age

Ⅰ. Introduction

From the migrant care-workers arriving in Japan from the Philippines and Indonesia to support the depleted social support system for the large population of the elderly (Ogawa 2012) to the increasing number of retiring Japanese embarking on long-stay tourism in Malaysia (Ono 2015), the Japanese image of Southeast Asia as an exotic destination offering cheap labor in return for official development assistance seems to be fading away. Yet these changes are not necessarily reflected in the way contemporary Japanese, especially those who belong to the global, "spiritual-but not-religious" (Fuller 2001) population, think of and "consume" Southeast Asia in their daily lives. This paper argues that in Japan's large spiritual (New Age[1]) market, which targets people seeking alternative ways to express their religiosity, the old-fashioned exoticism of Southeast Asian narratives were integrated in a totalizing discourse, which contrasts a "traditionally spiritual Southeast Asia" to a "spiritually advanced West." Furthermore, in this reification of the old East-West dualism, Japan remains the exceptional outlier (Tanaka 1993), a country claimed to be "advanced" both spiritually and economically. To illustrate my argument, I will discuss three case-studies: spiritual tours of Southeast Asia for Japanese tourists, the recent popularity of Thai massage in Japan, and the case of an NGO active in Cambodia co-founded by a Japanese spiritual therapist and chaneller, whom I

1) In this paper I employ the word New Age as an umbrella term that refers to the 1960's and 1970's millenarian aspirations that drove many youth of the North Western hemisphere (and later around the world) to embrace alternative practices of healing, channeling, and divination in order to transform themselves into "higher spiritual beings". Although, as Hammer notes (2010: 372), these millenarian aspirations are less common today, they can be considered to have inspired the individuals with whom I associate this word in this paper.

call here Ms. Mizushima.

The cover of the Japanese edition of *Newsweek* on May 16, 2007 bore the picture of television celebrity and self-proclaimed "spiritual counselor" Ehara Hiroyuki, with the title, "The spiritual and the Japanese: A British journalist explores the spirit boom and the gap in the hearts of the Japanese". Inside the magazine, author Colin Joyce reports that despite several media phenomena centered on occult themes and practices (an area recently called "occulture" [see Partridge 2013]) occurring in post-war Japan (most prominently in the 1970's with the arrival of spoon-bending Uri Geller and the publication of *the Great Prophecies of Nostradamus*[2]), "it is the first time that someone like Ehara becomes accepted into mainstream society and receives the support of the youth'[3] (Joyce 2007: 48). Indeed, on that year, it may have seemed that the so-called "spiritual boom" had reached its peak, with Ehara's weekly televised spiritualist sessions, where he would call on the guardian spirit of the celebrity guests to receive advice on their past and future lives. The program was broadcast nationwide on Saturday evenings, during the so-called primetime slot of 8 to 9 pm. Newspapers also reported on the popularity of local events such as spiritual conventions (*supikon*), where booth after booth, channelers, spiritual healers, and fortune-tellers, such as Ms. Mizushima, offered services for a few thousand yen in the hope that some of these clients would come for a more expensive session at their private salon. A book published the same year by another journalist Isomura Kentarō reported that ten Japanese cities hosted a *supikon* and the one held in Tokyo gathered approximately 1,300 visitors every two to three months (Isomura 2007: 58).

The popularity of such alternative healing and magico-religious

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2) Gotō, Ben. 1973. Nostradamus no dai yogen. Tokyo: Shodensha.

3) Joyce is wrong in this claim because the 1970's occult boom was probably as mainstream and as youth-supported as the recent "spiritual boom".

practices can be located along a pervasive modern interest in what has been called "metaphysical religion", a "religion (that) turns on an individual's experience of 'mind'" (Albanese 2007: 6) or "modern spirituality", which is "central to what is presented as both alternative to empty secular and religious life… (and) seems to allow people to pursue their secular goals in career and life within deeply disciplining institutions without being too stressed or depressed…(because) it leads to feeling comfortable with it (one's life) from an experience of spirituality, however produced"(van der Veer 2009: 1116). Practitioners such as Ms. Mizushima, who I will talk about later in this paper, entered this "spiritual business" (see Gaitanidis 2011) because of personal dissatisfaction with their lifestyles (see Gaitanidis and Murakami 2014). However, their understanding of the spiritual is still "shaped by their participation in institutional fields that define appropriate ways to encounter and speak of the spiritual, and its religious, aesthetic, and scientific realities" (Bender 2010: 44). Since at least the 19th century, one of these institutional fields which shaped the definition of "spirituality" consisted of the global network of translations of books and self-help manuals that created an impact on the interpretation of personal religious experiences, from the United States to Western Europe and to Japan (see Yoshinaga 2015). This network has now expanded into the world of television and internet media, provoking several "booms"[4] (as they are called in Japan) of public interest, the last of which was, most appropriately, called the "spiritual boom" (*supirichuaru būmu*) or Ehara boom, named after the aforementioned Ehara Hiroyuki.

Although this spiritual business in today's Japan can be sometimes seen as an extension of mainly American and European

4) Some researchers tried to separate chronologically these media booms using keywords often used in popular outlets at each of these periods, such as, for example, the occult (*okaruto*) boom in the 1970's, the fortune-telling (*uranai*) boom in the 1980's, the healing (*iyashi*) boom of the 1990's, and the spiritual boom of the 2000's (see, for example, Ichiyanagi 2006).

contemporary spirituality culture (Gaitanidis 2011), it has also integrated, sometimes through the Western route and sometimes directly, Asian beliefs and practices, albeit re-interpreted through a modern spirituality lens. Examples of these re-interpretations are sojourns into Ayurveda medicine to Thai massage, and even to entirely new, "hybrid" techniques, such as the so-called "pranic healing", an allegedly "highly evolved and tested system of energy medicine by Grandmaster Choa Kok Sui (a Chinese Filipino) that utilizes *prana* to balance, harmonize and transform the body's energy processes".[5] Earlier research has discussed claims by practitioners of these "spiritual therapies" who dismiss fortune-telling, a more pervasive and larger business sector in Japan (see Martin 2009), as simple statistics (Gaitanidis 2012: 371), despite the fact that spiritual therapists and hand- or tarot-readers often share spaces in popular healing and spiritual fairs. Indeed, it could be said that much of the "spiritual" involves healing, therapy, and an alternative lifestyle, in contrast to the regular visits to the fortune-teller who would usually answer "mundane" questions such as "when I will be able to marry?" and "what is a lucky name for my newborn baby?" These claims of superiority on the part of the spiritual therapists also form, I would argue, part of the counter-cultural narratives of modern spirituality, the currents of globalization of which are based on the promise of, as already noted, alternatives to both institutionalized religion and secularism, and, by extension, of alternative lifestyles, free of capitalist needs, social pressures, and mundane issues.

It would certainly not be an exaggeration to say that the cradle of sources on which these alternative narratives have been inspired from since the 19th century were the colonies (see for example, Owen 2008), and particularly the Orient as it was re-imagined by the (Christian) colonial powers in their "attempts not so much to

5) See http://pranichealing.com/explore (accessed April 10, 2016). Pranic healing was popularized through Choa Kok Sui's book, *Miracles Through Pranic Healing*, first published in 1987.

convert people to Christianity but to find a universal morality or spirituality in other religious traditions" (van der Veer 2009: 1103). Today, these colonial narratives have returned to the Orient, and hence, to Japan, a former colonizer, and a producer, as I argue in this paper, of its own alternative narratives towards popular spiritual destinations, such as Sedona or Hawaii in the United States, but also towards its former colonies in Southeast Asia. In other words, it is neither that Southeast Asia in this paper is treated as a unique case of the spiritualization of exoticism by Japanese spiritually-minded visitors, nor that the three case-studies discussed below are considered to be representative of the modern spiritual arena in Japan. The existence of these Japanese narratives bears particular meaning and provides an interesting illustration of how colonial discourse-driven imagery of an allegedly spiritually exotic Southeast Asia can be found today within the cradle of modern spiritual sources, namely the Orient, where it combines local contemporary discourses of spirituality with old ghosts of imperialist rhetoric.

Indeed, Japan's spiritual business includes a wealth of spiritual tours, with Indonesia and Thailand occupying today the top two destinations (after the still unbeatable Sedona, in Arizona, and Hawaii in the United States). The cover of *Travel Guide of the Power Spots in the World*[6], a one-off magazine publication of 2010, shows the names of three destinations, Sedona, Hawaii and Bali, as "the world's three greatest power spots that can be visited in 5 days 3 nights". Subsequently, Sedona was explained as a location where "the Yavapai Indians have opened several doors between the world of the gods and our world" (p.13); Hawaii was described as an island filled with legends and with the footprints of Ancient Hawaiians (p.51), while readers were reminded that Bali is often referred to as "the island of the gods: (p.73). Considering that many

6) This is the subtitle of the magazine. The Japanese title translates as *Guide of Power Spots in Japan and the World* (Nihon to sekai no pawā supotto gaido).

of the photos and descriptions in this and other Japanese magazines on power spots[7] borrow the viewpoint of American photographer and popular website www.sacredsites.com owner Martin Gray, it would seem that local Japanese voices do not particularly stand out in this colonial rhetoric. Yet, this is not always the case. In this instance, for example, the small print assumingly targeting the Japanese reader often hints as to a distinction between Southeast Asian destinations and the rest of the world. Indeed, under the title page of Bali, a few lines read as follows: "elderly visitors are heard saying that if it were not for the palm trees, Bali looks like old Japan. Is there a connection with Japan? When in Bali, there is something that resounds inside our hearts" (p.72). In order to explore, therefore, the role played by Southeast Asia in contemporary Japanese "spiritual" imagery, I shall first delve into a brief analysis of the region as a "spiritual destination" for contemporary Japanese.

Ⅱ. Japanese view of Southeast Asia: poor, exotic…and spiritual?

In his seminal study of Japan's relations with Southeast Asia, Ken'ichi Goto argued that the Greater East Asia War was not a war to liberate the colonies, but an attempt to reorganize colonies with Japan as the leader. "Japan viewed Southeast Asia as an area possessing great wealth in the form of unexploited resources that Japan needed, as a region politically suffering under the harsh rule of Western colonialism, and as an area where the people had only reached a very low stage of development. With this Japanese perception of Southeast Asia, Japan justified its southward advance using the slogan, Return to Asia" (Goto 2003: 23). Indeed, at a recent exhibition of the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo[8], a

7) Such as volume 4 of Voice Style special issue magazine entitled *200 Power Spots* and published in 2009.

8) *Visit Japan: Tourism Promotion in the 1920s and 1930s*, January 9 to February 28, 2016 (http://www.momat.go.jp/archives/english/am/exhibition/visit_japan/index.htm)

poster advertising Dai Nippon Airways (the forerunner of the Japan Airlines) dated 1940 showed a large aircraft of the company flying over a map of Southeast Asia, with the shadow of the aircraft covering most of the region. Underneath the shadow, Southeast Asia appears as a uniform area (there are no country borders or city names) in a sand-like yellow color. Here and there, rivers and groves are depicted, as well as “exotic” animals such as an elephant (in northern Thailand), a cobra (somewhere north of Kuala Lumpur) and a crocodile (in East Kalimantan). Some people are also shown scattered around the region, two of them half naked, and the other in what may be assumed as “traditional attire”, fishing, playing music, or dancing. Finally, accompanying this image of “untouched” wilderness and “under-development,” and as if to confirm Goto’s argument, icons representing gold (in southern Philippines), coffee (all along Indonesia) and petroleum (in east Borneo) complete a Southeast Asia waiting to be “freed” and explored by the Japanese tourists of the time.

A quick look through online brochures of spiritual tours to Southeast Asia offered in Japan seems to affirm that this view of the region as that of “untouched tradition and nature” persists even today. For example, a list of top 50 world “power-spots” or locations where visitors can go to replenish their “energies”, in a popular website for “experienced travelers” (*ryokō no tatsujin*), ranked Myanmar’s Golden Rock and Bagan at 3rd and 4th, Tanah Lot and Borobudur Temples at 7th and 8th, Angkor Wat at 10th, and, finally, Wat Phra Kew and Phi Phi Island at 14th and 15th[9]. AB-ROAD, another website claiming to be Japan’s largest search-and-compare web engine of travel and tours to foreign destinations, lists 68 spiritual tours. The website shows that the two most popular destinations appear to be Hawaii and Chennai (in South India). Its list also includes the following: 6 tours to Indonesia (3 in Bali where

9) http://ryoko-tatsujin.net/world-recommended/15856/ (accessed April 10, 2016).

visitors are invited to buy power stones, bells and singing bowls, take photos of their aura at a local Japanese therapy salon, and try out the local spa; a tour to Surakarta to experience the traditions of Islam; a tour to Tana Toraja to see the Toraja tribe; and a tour to Borobudur); 4 tours to Singapore (2 tours to Little India to try out Indian fortunetelling, a tour to China Town to experience the "mismatch of different architectures", and a tour to a Sikh temple to experience Sikh altruism by tasting the food distributed for free to all visitors); a tour in Cambodia to have a taste of Cambodian divination; and a tour in Myanmar, to observe the strict rules, particularly concerning women, of Theravada Buddhism[10]. Save for Singapore where the spiritual tourist is invited to try out Indian, Chinese and Sikh spiritual experiences and never any "Singaporean" one, the rest of the destinations are either related to nature (power stones, spa) or related to "local" religious cultures, such as visits to centuries-old temples and experiencing local divination techniques.

It appears therefore that even in this new spirituality culture of tourism, where the individualization of religion has led to the reinvention, (re)discovery, and re-imagination of certain locations as spiritual power spots (Okamoto 2015: 151-181), Southeast Asia has joined other locations around the world described as destinations of exotic untouched nature and untouched religious traditions. Yet, if our analysis stops here, it would come short of revealing how this imagery of Southeast Asia reveals a very significant aspect of modern spirituality, that of a cultural ethnocentrism by which certain religious traditions considered as old and representative of a certain culture are *selectively* integrated in the modern spirituality discourse, with the hope of re-categorizing them along a spiritual hierarchy that reinforces existing political views. In fact, I argue here that this selective "spiritualization" of an exotic and traditional Southeast Asia mirrors a similar phenomenon in Japan. Indeed, the

10) www.ab-road.net/kw/海外スピリチュアルツアー/guide/ (accessed April 10, 2016)

1995 terrorist attack in Tokyo by the new religious group Aum Shinrikyō led to an exacerbation of existing mistrust towards institutional religion, though some of these "traditional religions" escaped criticism by being relabeled "spiritual". Some Shinto shrines have become power spots (Kan 2010) and several Zen temples also act as yoga and meditation centers (Borup 2015), having thus reached "the same status and quality as the globally circulating New Age spirituality" (Horie 2013: 100).

This transfer of the Japanese phenomenon of cultural ethnocentrism through selective spiritualization of "traditional" religion to Southeast Asia can be said to have happened under the influence of the "New Asianism" which arose in Japan in the 1980's. The thorough analysis of this New Asianism complicates, indeed, the recent image of Asia in Japan by identifying at least three normative positions: Asia as Japan (or Asia as a vehicle of reproduction for Japan), Japan in Asia ["a therapeutic project aimed at healing past wounds through contrition and building communities of trust and direct human interaction" (Avenell 2014: 1598)], and Asia for Japan (or an in-between position which downplays the existence of an Asia community, but recognizes the necessity of regional cooperation and engagement). Among the three positions, the cultural nationalism of the Asia-as-Japan discourse stands out as the strongest remnant of war ideology, albeit modified to fit the new economic situation of Japan in Asia. Some theorists, as Avenell describes, came to imagine Asia "as a fantastic mixture of the "pre-modern," the "modern," and the "hyper-modern," all of which reacted, "giving off sparks," to produce the "fascination" of a "wonderland" far more authentic than the ordered monotony of urban life in contemporary Japan" (ibid: 1610). Paradoxically, therefore, together with that of a region with large sex industries (see Leheny 2006: 89), Southeast Asia by the beginning of the 21st century acquired a "feeling of spiritual authenticity", as the English description

of a Bali yoga and healing tour advertised by a local Japanese tourist office, shows below:

> There are many power spots and superb view spots in Bali surrounded by Indian Ocean, and it has been called an 'Island of magnificent energy' and 'God's island' since long time ago. Yoga lessons are really popular to purify body and mind. Balinese people believe Bali Hinduism and pray every day to keep tradition of healing.[11)]

Ⅲ. Orientalization of orientalism and the psychologization of Thai massage

Of course, photos of blue lagoons, yoga, or meditation postures in front of a sunset beach or a Hindu temple, and semi-naked models facing down on a massage table, confirm that the staged authority of promotional markers of Southeast Asia, namely nature, tradition, and alternative therapy, are maybe as old as modern tourism itself. And these markers are not only used to advertise tourist destinations, but also the practice of allegedly "authentic" Southeast Asian therapies in Japan as well. A representative example of this is the relatively recent popularity of Thai massage in urban centers such as Tokyo, where neon signs advertising "traditional Thai massage" (*koshiki tai massāji*) promise passers-by to relieve them not only from headaches, lower back pain, or stiff shoulders, but also from stress, anxiety, and sometimes even hysteria[12)].

The Japan Thai Massage Association was founded in September 2001 and has since grown exponentially. For example, Wai Wai Thailand, a Japanese portal website for information on Thailand, currently lists 1,099 salons offering Thai massage nationwide[13)]. In

11) http://www.bali-spa-hirochan.com/hi-yog/english.html (accessed April 10, 2016)
12) See for example, the English page of the NPO, Traditional Thai Massage Association, Japan (http://traditional-thai-massage.com/effection/index.htm, accessed April 10, 2016)

the yearly *Therapy All Guide (TAG)*, a magazine published since 1997 and annually compiling the most popular alternative therapies and salons, Thai massage appeared for the first time in the 2002 edition, in an article sponsored by the Japan Thai Massage Association. The article informs us that Thai massage is a traditional type of massage founded 2,500 years ago by the personal doctor of Buddha himself, Shivaga Komarpaj, who was inspired by both Hindu and Chinese medicines. The author further reports on two specific advantages of Thai massage, described as a perfect balance of finger-pressure massage, stretching and chiropractic (*setai*), and is influenced by Buddhism that helps achieve the relaxation by way of the spiritual state of perfect selflessness (*muga no kyōchi*) (TAG 2002: 76). The 2007 edition of the same magazine contains the same text, although the original and rather simple title of “Thai massage” was replaced by the more eye-catching “A Traditional Therapy Leading to Spiritual Selflessness (*Muga no kyōchi e michibiku dentō ryōhō*)” (TAG 2007: 90). Five years later however, in the 2012 edition of the *Therapy All Guide*, the tone of the double-page feature on Thai massage changed.

In 2012, the article was retitled “A Healing Art that Helps Your Breathing”. A brief description under the title reads: “Thai massage leads both the client and the masseur to a healthier life and that is why it is also called a ‘healing art’. Recently it has attracted the attention of elderly care and rehabilitation professionals, as well as athletes. In our stressful society, Thai massage makes people feel better, and is therefore bound to become more demanded” (TAG 2012: 52). Another difference with previous editions is that the article is not sponsored by the Japan Thai Massage Association, but by the Shibuya Nuara Life School, the Japanese branch of International Training Massage School, a Thai massage educational institution based in Chiang Mai.[14] As Thai massage, therefore, has escaped the

13) http://www.waiwaithailand.com/shoplist/massage.html (accessed April 10 2016)

original route of transmission from Thailand to Japan, it is perhaps no surprise that it has also undergone a certain degree of psychologization (Rose 1998: 59-60), which characterizes modern spirituality and which can be clearly demonstrated by the substantial decrease of body-based therapies against an increase of mind-based therapies throughout the fifteen editions of *Therapy All Guide* from 1997 to 2013 (Gaitanidis 2013). What is maybe more surprising, however, is that, like modern yoga (Singleton 2010) and Ayurveda (Langford 2002), contemporary Thai massage is a product of global modern spirituality, and not a 2,500 year-old tradition.

Indeed, as Junko Iida shows, the whole-body Thai massage involving balance, harmony, and the revitalization of spiritual energies, was a 1990's product of transnational encounters among three groups of actors: "'Eastern"-oriented Europeans and North-Americans, who found similarities between Thai massage and yoga, "foreign"-oriented Thais, who aimed to benefit from foreigners' Orientalist imaginations and expectations, and the Thai urban middle class, who have been influenced by the globalizing culture of healthism" (Iida 2013: 105-106). As we can learn from Iida's study, Thai massage was introduced to a Western audience through a book first published in 1990 by Harald Brust, better known as Asokananda, a German who had originally learned yoga and meditation in Sri Lanka from an American Buddhist monk. In the 1980's, Asokananda moved to Chiang Mai to learn Thai massage because he found it had similarities with yoga, something that influenced his emphasis on the Indian origins of Thai massage. Iida argues, however, that Asokananda's translation (or mistranslation) of *sen*, the Thai massage concept referring to the part of the body that causes pain or stiffness when it is tensed or shifted out of alignment, into "energy line" in English, integrated Thai massage into the global imaginary of "ancient oriental" healing methods (ibid.: 95-96). As a

14) http://www.itmthaimassage.com/ (accessed April 10, 2016)

result, Thai massage was standardized by the Thai government along similar lines to Asokananda's understanding of the technique, and later exported to non-Western countries such as Japan. Worthy of note here is that Ōtsuki Kazuhiro, the president of the Japan Thai Massage Association and alleged importer of Thai massage to Japan, says on the association's official homepage that he learned Thai massage in 1988, from Sombat Tapanya, a psychologist at Chiang Mai University[15].

This orientalization of the Orient, in the case of Thai massage, or easternization of the East, as Borup (2015) calls it in his discussion of Zen and spirituality in contemporary Japan, complicates further the spiritualization of Southeast Asia in the Japanese imagination, because certain aspects of Southeast Asia reached Japan *after* having been sifted through a Western orientalist filter that renders them simultaneously more "exotic" and also more "Western," hence exasperating, in a sense, a reification of the old East-West dualism in which Japan remains the exceptional outlier, neither Western nor Eastern (Tanaka 1993). Yet, this analysis of the imagery of Southeast Asia in Japan's new spirituality culture would not be complete without a third vector in this complex network of hegemonic and orientalist discourses. Indeed, if some spiritual therapists see Southeast Asia as a hub of "authentic spirituality" mirroring their own search for an "authentic spiritual tradition", and as an alternative source of alternative therapeutic techniques seemingly unique, but actually already adapted to the global market of modern spirituality, some may also see the region as a locus of action, where they can ultimately colonize Southeast Asian spirituality through an utterly modern nationalist discourse of "religionless" Japanese spirituality. It is to this aspect that the next and final section of this paper is dedicated to, through an analysis of the case of Ms. Mizushima, a spiritual therapist, not dissimilar to the rest of therapists active today

15) http://thaimassage.jp/menu_01.html (accessed April, 10, 2016)

in Japan, but holder of an interesting list of professional activities that include the management of a non-governmental organization in Cambodia.

Ⅳ. Teaching "proper" religion through "spiritual" means: a spiritual therapist in development work

Ms. Mizushima is 55 years old, single, and lives in a spare room that she turned into a healing salon, on the ground floor of the mansion of a popular film and television drama director in the outskirts of Tokyo. She moved in fifteen years ago, when the owner of the mansion, convinced of her healing powers during a trip together to Okinawa, invited her to open her practice at his home. Although it is still early in the day, the curtains are closed and the room is only dimly lit up. As Ms. Mizushima shows me inside, I see a bed at the back, which she uses for the clients during her spiritual therapy sessions, and a small desk with two chairs. The place smells of a mixture of flower essences and the walls are covered with pictures and drawings of various deities from the Buddhist and Hindu pantheon. There are also other types of drawings, some looking like psychedelic art, and some photos of Ms Mizushima herself, in what I assume is Cambodia, the reason I came to interview her. Indeed, from what I had read in a women's magazine dedicated to spirituality, Ms. Mizushima founded with two other Japanese women an NGO that supports local Cambodian production and manufacturing of silk garments for export to Japan. This is a relatively rare case among over 70 Japanese therapists, similar to Ms. Mizushima, who I have interviewed in the past six years. Although some of these "spiritual therapists", may be contributing regular donations to various types of social support organizations, rarely had I seen anyone personally engaged in community-based development work.

In other aspects, however, Ms. Mizushima is no different from the rest of the spiritual therapists I have interviewed in the past. Born in 1961, by the age of 26 she had reached the rank of brand chief in a fashion designer company in central Tokyo. She remembers those times as times of excess: long hours of work, a lot of money but not much happiness. At the time, she starts visiting fortune-tellers and is led to a seminar of holotropic breathwork, a type of breathing technique deriving from transpersonal psychology and assumed to have therapeutic effects among New Age circles. She is "hooked", as she said to me, and joins regular sessions, during which her trance states lead her to visions of what she believes to be her past lives where she appears as, sometimes, a Tibetan monk, and sometimes a Spanish witch later killed in the witch hunts of the Middle Ages. However, as Japan's bubble economy burst in the beginning of the 1990's, Ms. Mizushima starts feeling at odds with her workplace's changing policies, and decides to quit. She then embarks on a spiritual tour to Egypt, where she attends several meditation sessions with Kevin Ryerson, a channeler mostly made famous in the book of American actress Shirley MacLaine, *Out on a Limb* (1983), a sort of New Age "bible".

On her return from Egypt in 1992, Ms. Mizushima starts having channeling contacts with several divinities, some of them Buddhist. She starts participating in various meditation circles around the country and becomes involved in New Age events, from music concerts with Japanese trumpeter Kondo Toshinori, to spiritual talks with the Dalai Lama, whom she heard speak to her directly in her head. It is in one of these events where she meets Gayuna Cealo, a Japanese monk ordained in the Theravada Buddhist tradition of Myanmar. Cealo, she claims, inspired her to put her heart into practice (*kokoro o jikko suru*), and led her to establish with two friends an NGO in Cambodia. Considering the long history of Japanese involvement in development projects in Myanmar,

Cambodia, and other countries of Southeast Asia (see Peng Er 2013), Ms. Mizushima's decision is not surprising, but when she became the author of a series of articles in which she linked her spirituality to her development work, I was intrigued to find out how she conceived of this link between her profession as a healer and her view of Southeast Asia.

Ms. Mizushima's first contact with Cambodia and her ensuing interpretation of Southeast Asian spirituality seems to have originated and continues to be influenced by Cealo Gayuna. Ms Mizushima met Cealo in Heart Expo 2004[16], a weeklong international event organized in Kagawa, Japan, by the Non-Profit Organization *Cealo Global Harmony Japan*. Participating as a volunteer, Ms. Mizushima found Cealo's message of "you can apply your heart anywhere" (*kokoro o dokodemo jikko dekiru*) inspiring, and later followed him for a tour to Cambodia. Since then, she often accompanies Cealo to Sedona, where Cealo gives talks and offers individual séances[17] through his *Foundation for Global Harmony*, based in Evanston, Illinois. Cealo's foundations organize meditation events and public speeches, as well as hot-spring retreats for both Japanese and non-Japanese since 2011.

Convinced by Cealo that "just being spiritual is not enough", Ms. Mizushima related that she decided to put her spirituality into practice and, with the two women she met on her first trip to Cambodia with Cealo, founded a Non-Profit Organization (NPO) in 2008. The NPO has so far mainly managed a small project in a village of the Prek Veng province, in the south of the country. There,

16) http://cealo-ngo.org/record/HE1.htm (accessed April, 10, 2016)

17) Stewart M Hoover's *Religion in the Media Age* discusses briefly the case of Priscilla, an American woman who has been following Cealo's sessions both live and on the internet, spurring Hoover to make the argument that Cealo's web-based ministry is not based on the authenticity of a Buddhist tradition (he used to be after all a Japanese businessman), but on the kind of exploratory spirituality that is conveyed through his accessibility on the Internet (Hoover 2006: 138).

Ms. Mizushima and her friends support the manufacture of silk clothes that are then purchased by one of the NPO co-founders, who resells them to the Japanese fashion industry.

Asked on what she thought about Cambodia, Ms. Mizushima compared it first to Okinawa, where, she argued, "original spirituality" had started being corrupted by the opening of the place to urban development and tourism. She even went as far as claiming that, in Cambodia, it was maybe "thanks to the military junta that the modern lifestyle only came later (*gunji seiken atta okagede modan na seikatsu ga haitte konakatta*)", and thus allowed the Buddhist temples to "keep their original energy". Asked further on her thoughts about her work in Cambodia, Ms. Mizushima presented a rather paradoxical analysis of the role the Japanese are supposed to play in the country. On the one hand, she criticized the entire Southeast Asia for being jealous of the Japanese for having reached such a state of wealth and happiness, without understanding how hard the Japanese work to earn money. But, she also blamed Japan for sending such an image through anime and popular culture rather than through documentaries, such as Project X[18], that demonstrate Japanese craftsmanship. But, when talking about the contributions that Japan can make in terms of spirituality, Ms. Mizushima's analysis becomes difficult to follow: on the one hand, she blamed Japanese Buddhism for having become too commercialized, but, on the other hand, she believed that most Cambodian monks are corrupt and, therefore, cannot teach children "proper Buddhism". For this reason, therefore, she said that she had also volunteered in the past for a Japanese NGO that makes children books to teach

18) *Project X: Challengers* was aired between March 2000 and December 2005 on NHK. The show reenacted the trials and triumphs of technical innovators of postwar Japan, such as the inventors of the VHS, the bullet train or the LCD television. Shimoda has argued that Project X romanticizes the collectivism of Japan's militarized past and "praises the war's positive, if unintended, yield, thus redeeming the wartime experience and making it more palatable" (Shimoda 2013:248-248)

"correct Buddhism" (*tadashii bukkyō*) to Cambodian children.

Ms. Mizushima's engagement in Cambodia as a spiritual therapist could be summarized in the following manner. On a personal level, she seems to be considering her participation in the development project and her volunteer work as a way to apply her spirituality in daily life, beyond the one-on-one sessions she usually conducts in her salon in Tokyo. This personal objective, however, does not extend to a deeper understanding of the local society. In our discussion, for example, she often talked of the Cambodia women in the project, as if needing constant supervision in order to make clothes that would be of appropriate quality to sell to the very demanding Japanese consumers. Based on her comments on Cambodia's religious culture, she also seems not to expect to learn anything from it, but is rather ready to teach them "correct Buddhism". This view of Southeast Asia has undoubtedly been influenced by other Japanese she met on location, as well as, in her particular case, Cealo Gayuna himself.

As mentioned above, Cealo Gayuna used to be a Japanese business man, who in his latter life became a monk in the tradition of Theravada Buddhism. In the third book on Cealo, and first book not written by him but by two supporting members of *Cealo Global Harmony Japan*, we read that the name Cealo Gayuna comes from Cealo's original mispronunciation of two words: *Sayadaw* (meaning 'elder'), as Burmese tended to call him, and the Sanskrit 'karunā'[19] (meaning 'compassion') (Sunami and Nishioka 2007: 15-16). In the book, we also learn that Cealo Gayuna was born in 1947, and upon graduating from high-school, he chose to become a chef, and went as far as traveling for training to France, before building a career in Japan as a specialist of Japanese traditional cuisine with a French twist (ibid.: 21). Having reached success "by counting only on

19) Incidentally, if one searches for karunā on the Japanese web, most of the top results would refer to the practice of Thai massage.

himself", in his mid-forties, Cealo meets a charismatic Indian "saint", who changes his perspective on life. This saint is never named in the book, but according to Ms. Mizushima's testimony, this is the famous Indian guru Sai Baba (1926-2011), who is also clearly visible in a photo of Cealo taken in his Tokyo apartment (ibid.: 17). On his way to Sai Baba's ashram, Cealo stops by Myanmar to visit the Kyaiktiyo Pagoda over the Golden Rock (one of the destinations of the spiritual tours for Japanese tourists as mentioned above), and there, at the hotel, he receives a message from a monk who suddenly emerges out of the floor of the room and invites him to come again and make offerings for which he will be "given strength and become very popular". After visiting India, Cealo returns to Myanmar in 1995 and meets at a temple near the Golden Rock, a Buddhist priest who welcomes him back and tells him that he had heard of him from Sai Baba himself. Cealo then is ordained at the same temple.

It is important to note here that Sai Baba and the Sathya Sai movement he founded in the immediate postwar period formed a central component of the 1960's counter culture, and later the New Age and contemporary spirituality. The movement with an estimated following of 20 million in 2007 has been the subject of over 600 texts authored by Sai Baba, his devotees and scholars (Srinivas 2012: 184-185)[20]. One of the most talked about aspects of the movement, besides the allegations of corruption, fiscal management, abuse and, most famously, the faking of materializations of objects in the guru's hands, has been its "faith-based development model", by which he "inspired millions of his followers around the globe to take on charitable works in education, health, and healing initiatives, and in

20) In her book-length analysis of the movement (Srinivas 2010), anthropologist Tulasi Srinivas mentions that at the time of the publication there were 1,200 Sathya Sai centers around the world, with 192 in the United States, 170 in Great Britain, and 113 in the Malaysian archipelago, Thailand and Vietnam. The Japanese webpage records 26 centers (http://www.sathyasai.or.jp/english/html/centres_groups.html, accessed April, 10, 2016).

infrastructural and social development for charitable giving, philanthropy, and charitable work" (ibid.: 191). Like Cealo, and also like many of the spiritual therapists today, Sai Baba represented the epitome of modern spirituality by consciously drawing from various religious traditions, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity to produce a spiritual movement with a global appeal.

Consequently, I argue here that Cealo's direct action (what Ms. Mizushima called "put your heart into practice") and his claim that he refuses to do religion with all the institutional and clerical baggage (Cealo 2005: 175-176) stems from a combination of Sai Baba's faith-based development model with the non-religious character of Japanese faith-based organizations which, particularly in the post-Aum period, avoided being accused of proselytism, but at the same time aimed to be "making persons" (*hitozukuri*), a term that Japanese officials involved in international aid have been promoting as uniquely Japanese (see Watanabe 2015: 276-277). In other words, Cealo employs his status of re-born (not Japanese, but Southeast Asian) Buddhist to promote a New Age-type of religion-less global spirituality that makes him an exceptional outlier both in Japan and the Unites States, where he seems to offer an alternative "spiritual" worldview, and in Myanmar and Cambodia, where he is the Japanese bringing "correct Buddhism".

Ⅴ. Orientalists on orientalism

In his introduction to *Casting Faiths: Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia*, Thomas Dubois writes that "(f)or many European writers of the nineteenth century, all that was essential to Asia was expressed in condensed form in its religion, particularly when compared with that of the West. Asian religion was alternately portrayed as decadent or spiritual, primitive or sublime, depending as much as anything else on how the writer felt

about particular aspects of Christianity" (DuBois 2009: 6). In this paper, I have first argued that the spiritual Southeast Asia is created outside of Southeast Asia, in the American and Japanese spiritual markets of spiritual tours, and Thai traditional massages.

But I also claimed that this spiritualization of Southeast Asia may be said to reflect specific ethnocentric trends that form a central component of the Japanese spirituality discourse, which combines an aversion for anything religious, particularly after the Aum affair of 1995, with a long-lasting hegemonic view of Southeast Asia as the land of "untouched traditions and nature". I have shown that the meeting of a Indian New Age guru with a Japanese businessman-later turned monk has inspired a middle-aged spiritual therapist from Japan to engage in development work in Cambodia, and export an orientalist discourse in which Japan remains the exceptional outlier, a country advanced both economically and spiritually, but sometimes seemingly prone to forgetting its heritage and, thus, needing to find it in Southeast Asia, still untouched yet corrupted by modernity. Like the "fake" Chinese magician Chung Li Soo (a.k.a. William Ellsworth Robinson) who became more famous than the "real" Chinese magician Ching Ling Foo in late 19th century America (see Goto-Jones 2014), Cealo Gayuna, the "fake" Burmese monk who teaches "real" Japanese spirituality, demonstrates once more that "fake" and "real" lose meaning in a global orientalist discourse, where authenticity is more about performance than fact and where orientalists can be both objects and subjects of their own discourse.

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Received: Apr. 16, 2016; Reviewed: May 24, 2016; Accepted: Jun. 9, 2016