

The Application of Japanese Knowledge of Sekai Kyusei-Kyo Religious Movement in Health Care Practices of the Citizens in Northeast Thailand

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Abstract: The fundamental belief of health care and medical treatment of the people in Northeastern Thailand is deeply connected with buddhism, belief in ghosts, spirits and faith. The drastic change of economics, social and the rapid flow of religious cultures from foreign origins such as the Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement has influenced the people of Northeast Thailand's behavior in healthcare. The influx of external cultures can bring negative impacts to society if foreign customs are not understood and applied correctly. The Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement's knowledge in spiritual healing is a combination of Buddhism Shinto sect and Christianity. The Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement' faith was extended into Thailand formally in 1970 and currently has over 700,000 members. The Group's concepts and practices come from the teachings of Mokichi Okada or *Meishu-sama* (Enlightened Spiritual Leader) who established the Doctrine to re-create a Messianic Age or Paradise on Earth where there is no suffering, no disease, no sickness and has only peace. The Sekai Kyusei-kyo faith is carried out by 3 activities that include Johrei, Nature Farming and Kado Sangtesu floral arrangement. Many Northeast Thailand people believe in Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious practices in healthcare and have applied the knowledge in 2 methods: Learning the philosophy and teachings and practicing dharma truths.

Key words: Northeast Thailand, Isan Sekai Kyusei-kyo religious movement, Johrei, alternative medicine

INTRODUCTION

The majority of the population in Thailand worship Buddhism of the Theravada Sect. Buddhism is important to society and to the livelihood of Thais since ancient times. Temples serves as a center of worship and Buddhist monks service the community with Dharma teachings and philosophy. The temple and Buddhist monks together provide the public with social welfare with relief efforts and mediating social disputes to create peace in society so that all live together in harmony (Tambiah, 1970). Humans resort to religion when there is someone in trouble, ill, poor or have no one else to turn to. Buddhist temples also functions as a hospital. Local communities will turn to temples to seek medical treatment, therapy or help with mentally illnesses. Buddhist temples will provide healing by use of medicines and sacred chants. Buddhist Monks can be regarded as local healers who psychologically treat mental patients with Buddhism Doctrine.

Thailand's national policy during the past decade has been emphasized on the development of Capitalism,

Materialism and Consumerism which have dominated society. These policies have created many positive impacts as well as negative ones. The negative side of Capitalism is the increase of social problems, deteriorated attitudes, neglect of the environment, high rate of divorce and increased mental stress. All of these factors have contributed to the problems of personal health. Modernization has diverted people and faith away from temples and towards hostile customs that are enemies of development (Kachonsart, 2006). Modern medical treatments have provided better health care service to society as a whole more than in the past, but there are still dangerous diseases and illnesses that are still un-curable and those that still have no permanent treatment. At the same time, people are privileged with the right to choose and therefore many have sought other options of medical treatment other than hospitals and modern medicine. Many people have turned to Acupuncture, pressure point healing, massage, organic healing methods, herbal medicine and meditation are just a few (Terasiri and Nitrapon, 2003). This behavior has gained momentum in recent years from individuals and groups alike that are

seeking alternative medical treatment and has become an important factor in modern social health behavior. In modern society today, there are many people that have faith in the system of spiritual healing according to the beliefs and doctrines of The Sekai Kyusei-kyo religious movement. The Sekai Kyusei-kyo religious movement in Thailand refers their doctrine as a branch of Mahayana Buddhism. Sekai Kyusei-kyo religious movement doctrine was extended into Thailand in 1968 and within several years has become very successful due to the hundreds of thousands of members. Christianity has been in Thailand for the past 400 years but Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement has been able to achieve a large dominance in just 3-4 years (Chantngam, 1988). This phenomenon is direct evidence of the influence of culture diffusion of Thailand and Japan on the behaviors of how Northeast Thailand citizens take care of themselves and their health.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is a qualitative research aimed at research areas which include the Provinces of Roi-et Ubon Ratchatani and Nakorn Ratchasima in Northeast Thailand. The sample group of individuals included those who live in the communities where there is a Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement or Johrei center. The sample group included 15 ordinary citizens, 45 Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement members and 15 key informants who have direct knowledge in the practices of Sekai Kyusei-kyo beliefs, activities and therapy for spiritual healing. The sample group was selected by purposive sampling and the data was collected by in-depth interviews, structured and non-structured surveys and participant and non-participant observation and Group discussions. Field research was carried out during December 2007-May 2008. Qualitative research method was applied to the study and the field research data retrieved from was categorized accordingly to the purposes of the study of various aspects with regards to Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement's origin, knowledge and practices in health care activities belief in Isan. To gather the data, in-depth interviews of structured and non-structured were used with participant and non-participant observations, Focused group discussions of the sample group in the research area. The data retrieved was categorized according to typology analysis and analyze by using descriptive analysis.

RESULTS

Sekai Kyusei-kyo religious movement: The Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement was founded by

Japanese philosopher, Mokichi Okada (1882-1955) on January 1st, 1935 in Tokyo, Japan. During initiation period, the group was known as the Dai Nippon Kwannon Society. Shortly after World War II, the organization was transformed into 2 groups called The Nihon Kwannon Religious Society and Nihon Miroku-kyo Religious Society. When the two groups successfully extended their faith throughout Japan, they were united under the name of Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement in 1949 (i.e., the Church of World Messianity). The sect's goal is to create a Messianic Age or blessed world according to the visions of the Buddha where he envisioned the creation of a paradise on earth that is full of happiness, perfection, with people who are healthy, kind, sincere, merciful and freed of illnesses, freed from poverty and conflict.

Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement extended the teachings of their faith in Thailand by the lead of Mr. Kasuo Wakugami and formally established the organization called Moonlaniti Chumpehn Sahtarana Prayot Duay Kitjagum Tang Sassana (Public Benefit Organization by Religious Activities) in 1970. The Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement offers teachings and activities through numerous centers throughout Thailand. The national center (Seji) of worship in Thailand is at the Province of Saraburi in Central Thailand and there are 20 branches nationwide.

One out of 3 people in Thailand live in Northeastern Thailand or Isan. There were no Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement centers in Isan during the early years. Members back then would gather at the Main Center or Seji in the Province of Saraburi in Central Thailand. The large memberships led to the expansion of regional centers at the Province of Nakorn Ratchasima or Korat in Northeastern Thailand in 1988 and centers at the Province of Roi-et and Ubonratchatani in 1998. These 3 regional centers overlook all Sekai Kyusei-kyo religious movement activities in the 19 provinces in Isan. The expansion of Sekai Kyusei-kyo religious movement in Northeast Thailand shows the change in the economy, social customs and influx of Religious culture. Research goals of this research include, the study of the origin and background of Sekai Kyusei-kyo religious movement. The system of spiritual healing from Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement. How to apply the group's methods and beliefs to best benefit communities in Northeast Thailand. The knowledge gained from this research is to be used as an important basis in the unified development of guidelines and practices for alternative medical treatments and health care of citizens in Northeast Thailand and other regions in Thailand.

The current status of the application of Japanese knowledge of Sekai Kyusei-kyo religious movement in health care practices of the people in Northeast Thailand.

Sekai Kyusei-kyo religious movement activities: Is a system of spiritual healing that rely on alternative medicine or supplementary medical treatment that are applied together with modern medical practices of un-curable or extensive illnesses. In several rural communities, there are local indigenous healers that also apply traditional local remedies and these local healers also attend Sekai Kyusei-kyo activities. The holistic view of Sekai Kyusei-kyo religious movement's system of spiritual healing is the belief that the body, mind and eco system are all connected (Kreigh and Joanne, 1988).

Sampo or homage: Paying homage is an activity that all Sekai Kyusei-kyo religious movement members perform. The practice involves the reciting of prayers very much like prayers in Buddhism. Prayer requires about 15-20 min time and is recited in Japanese. The prayers nurture and create contemplation and the development of strong mental integrity. During prayers, members are to recollect their ancestors benevolence, Bodhisattva Avalokiesavara (Bodhisattva of Compassion) or revered by Asian communities as Kwanyin (Goddess of Mercy) and *Meishu-sama* (Enlightened Spiritual Leader ie., Mokichi Okada). Paying homage in this way, will influence one's physical strength because the body and mind are connected and depend upon each other. The cleansing of the mind will help the body relax and cure itself and provide immunity to illnesses and suffering.

Johrei: Johrei is Sekai Kyusei-kyo's system of spiritual healing therapy that aims to eliminate toxins from the body through the application of Divine energy. A treatment lasts 30-45 min and is conducted with the client fully clothed and seated. The therapist will ask questions about physical and mental health and then hold their right hand over the body to channel healing energy; areas of toxic build-up are found and with the Light, the toxins are channeled to the kidneys, which flush them out. Practitioners claim that Johrei boosts the body's immune system by eliminating toxins and encouraging the body to heal itself. The treatment is also beneficial for stress-related conditions, allergies and chronic pain. Johrei is given on a one-to-one basis by a qualified therapist (Dragon, 2008). The holding of the practitioner's right hand and wishing for divine light from Guanyin (Goddess of Mercy) to pass on to the client.

The belief in wanting others to be freed of suffering is one of the main doctrines in Mahayana Buddhism that

is *Phrom Wihan Si* or the four principles, the four truths, Virtuous Existence or the Sublime States of Mind is referred to by Sekai Kyusei-kyo to symbolize Johrei which translates into the wish to see others freed of suffering will provide you with happiness. The treatment or ritual therapy reflects the joyous of both parties that they have both done good deeds from the exchange of Johrei and prayers to each other. The continuous giving and receiving of Johrei will provide that individual with a healthy mind and physical perfection. The result to the Spiritual Being is that when the spirit is cleansed and pure, it will provide that person with love to pass on to others. It will also make that person more merciful, peace loving, always in a good mood, delightfully joyful and have positive attitudes. For the material being, it will provide a healthy physics, healthy complexion and physical efficiency.

Sekai Kyusei-kyo nature farming: Sekai Kyusei-kyo emphasizes members to take care of their health in parallel with Sampo and Johrei. The group promotes Nature Farming and Organic agriculture by nurturing earth with nutrients by the use of Effective Micro-organism (EM). The application of EM improved soil quality and productivity, Increased growth, yield and quality of crops, Improved animal health and production, Control of insect pests and diseases, Suppression of malodors from livestock operations, Increased production from aquaculture farms and Improved treatment of waste waters and effluents (Wakugami, 2008). Nature farming is a process that will improve health care by taking of the body and saving the environment. Those that honestly apply the practices can provide their families with a sustainable income and raise the level of their earnings. Being strong and healthy are important factors that contribute to the readiness of development in other areas. During important religious activities, members will bring out their nature farming and organic crops for sale at the 3 centers in Northeast Thailand. There are also sales of EM and organic fertilizers. Most of the families and individuals who consume nature farming produce do not use monosodium glutamate or seasoning powder and are always aware of correct hygienic conditions.

Sangetsu flower arrangement: Sekai Kyusei-kyo's system of spiritual healing is powered by families. Spiritual healing activities emphasize close relationship within the family and creating a pleasant atmosphere of warmth and love. Processes start with having respect towards each other, by greetings and polite gestures or Wai to everyone. The generosity towards each other creates trust and tending to each others needs. This

pattern of love and respect is materialized by engaging in an artistic traditional Japanese activity called Kado or Ikebana (Keeping flowers Alive). There are many schools or sects that teach flower arrangements in Japan and each have their own unique artistic style. Sangetsu art of flower arrangement was created by *Meishu-sama* and emphasizes on the comparison of branches to Father Branch, Mother Branch and Child Branch. All three branches are arranged to reveal the balance of responsibility and role to each other. Sekai Kyusei-kyo's faith believes that flower arrangement's artistic outlet can elevate the soul, lower selfishness, provide tranquility and purify the spirit.

The system of spiritual healing therapy of Sekai Kyusei-kyo of Johrei is communicated and passed on to others through relatives and word of mouth. Those who have strong belief in the treatment will persuade others to join by explaining the benefits and good that they will receive. Treatment is performed in public areas, villages and at established Johrei centers throughout Thailand. At the center there will be a Sewanin (governess, caretaker) to take care and coordinate activities and there will be members tend to friends and family with care and sincerity.

The system of spiritual healing is similar to providing public services. Sewanin's responsibilities and role are the same as public servants, where they visit members and ask about the member's well being, organize meetings, activities, develop understandings and invite guests and prospects to participate in the seminar. These activities are the responsibilities of the Sewanin and their responsibility is to expand presence of Sekai Kyusei-kyo to extend the faith.

The assimilation of Thai and Japanese culture of Sekai Kyusei-kyo has been accepted by the people of Northeastern Thailand to be in harmony with local Buddhism beliefs in the aspects of Kindness, Mercy, Gratefulness, Diligent and Energetic, etc. Field research conducted on site at the regional centers in Roi-et, Nakhonratchasima and Ubonratchatani has revealed detailed practices of the religious group. Before entering the center, all members must take off their shoes and place them in an orderly manner. The shoes are faced out away from the building which is a Japanese custom reflecting discipline. Diligence, Enthusiasm, Responsiveness and Punctuality which are all very important to Sekai Kyusei-kyo and is evident in all the activities such as Meetings, Training, Seminars, Paying Homage and Praying etc. Upon entering the center, warm greetings will be exchanged with the centers caretakers. The Sewanins will help guide members in the various activities with close attention under the pleasant environment of the center

which will benefit the health and spiritual well being of members and welcomed guests.

The application of Sekai Kyusei-kyo in Health Care Practices in Isan: The Sekai Kyusei-kyo health care practices in Isan have been applied in 2 methods.

Learning: Members of Sekai Kyusei-kyo engage in the exchange of knowledge in theory and practices. New members are enrolled in Mental Development courses for 2 days at the Johrei center closes to their home. On completion of the course, the members will receive the Hochi medal (Medal of Aura) where they are acknowledged as full members of the doctrine. Afterwards they will be given assignments to fulfill and contacted with guidelines and advice from Sewanins on a regular basis.

Practice dharma or the truths: After acquiring faith and knowledge of Sekai Kyusei-kyo Doctrine, members will put the knowledge into practice so that the Truth, Goodness and Spiritual Beauty are realized. The 3 goals must be pursued in harmony by holding to the 4 truths of *Maettah* (Compassion), *Karuna* (Mercy), *Mutitah* (Rejoice in Others Happiness) and *Ubehka* (Tranquility). To achieve these goals members must perform 3 responsibilities of Sampo (Homage), Johrei Therapy and Hochi (Serving the faith).

CONCLUSION

The Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement's knowledge in spiritual healing is a combination of Buddhism Shinto sect and Christianity. The Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement was extended into Thailand formally in 1970 under the name Moonlaniti Chumpehn Sahtarana Prayohit Duay Kitjagum Tang Sassana (Public Benefit Organization by Religious Activities). The Group's Doctrine and practices come from the teachings of Mokichi Okada or *Meishu-sama* (Enlightened Spiritual Leader), who established the Doctrine to re-create a Paradise on Earth where there is no suffering, no disease, no sickness but only peace. Many Northeast Thailand people believe in Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious practices and have applied the faith in two methods which are Learning the philosophy and teachings. Practicing Dharma Truths. The Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Movement faith is carried out by 3 activities that include Johrei, Nature Farming and Kado Sangtesu floral arrangement.

Cultural diffusion from the fundamental beliefs in Buddhism of Japan and Thailand has influenced the

lifestyles of the people in Northeastern Thailand. The assimilation was possible due the cultural background and faith of both countries in Buddhism. The Holistic view of Health treatment of local Indigenous people in Northeast Thailand is rooted in Brahmanism, Spirits, Buddhism and the belief of creating heaven on earth of Sekai Kyusei-kyo Religious Group. Practices and concepts shared the same principles of meditation, wishing, mental development, spiritual uplifting and healing to cure illnesses and physical development. The system of spiritual healing or Johrei concept has been accepted in a wider circle. Communities in Northeastern Thailand have a better understanding of Johrei and do not regard it as a spectacle as before. Many view that Johrei is very similar to Local Indigenous Knowledge in folk healing but only different in ritual, technique and application. Sekai Kyusei-kyo practices are not complicated and can be adapted to the traditional healing methods of Local Indigenous Healers that share deep relationship to Buddhist temples, Monks and traditional village customs. Local villagers do not have to leave their original faith in Buddhism and worship Sekai Kyusei-kyo, so there are no conflicts. The activities of Sekai Kyusei-kyo has gained interest and accepted as a part of the livelihood of the people in the local community and from several government health agencies where Sekai Kyusei-kyo members have been permitted to perform Johrei treatment in several hospitals. Johrei has provided a supplementary treatment and is an alternative source of medical care that has provided the public with a choice in improving their health.

SUGGESTIONS

There are many people in Isan communities that are interested in the healing techniques of Johrei and Sekai Kyusei-kyo methods of spiritual healing and alternative medical treatments of local indigenous healers and customs. Most are not sure if these alternatives would

benefit them because of the lack of in-depth studies and scientific research. Educational institutions and medical organizations should support the studies of these alternative choice of medical practices so that understanding, standards and trust can be made available to local citizens to decide.

Research studies should be undertaken to compare the various benefits and disadvantages of Modern medical practices, local indigenous customs and Sekai Kyusei-kyo methods in different communities and regions. The ultimate goal is to create a standard health care policy for communities and to raise the understanding of the different practices to keep up with modernization and health care trends of both mainstream and alternatives.

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