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OYASAMA, GOD THE PARENT AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN TENRIKYÔ

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The name Tenrikyô comes from *Tenri*, meaning heavenly or divine principle of wisdom or reason. Considered one of the older New Religions of Japan, was founded in 1838 in the city of Tenri, six miles south of Nara, the ancient capital of Japan. The Foundress was a simple peasant woman. In her forty-first year, while assisting in a ritual to heal an ailment that had stricken her family, Miki Nakayama became convinced that she had become the shrine of God. After a short period of great skepticism, Miki managed to convince those around her that God now resided within her body and that every word she spoke, therefore, emanated from the mind of God. In fact, her mind was now that of God, who wanted to use her to reveal divine truths concerning human salvation. Shortly afterwards, Miki began to teach the truths that God had revealed to her, spending the remaining 50 years of her life as the mouthpiece of God. As the years passed she managed to gain a substantial following and established a center of worship for Tenrikyô practitioners (the place of the origin of humanity according to her teaching) together with a worship service. She authored two of the three scriptural texts of Tenrikyô. Written by Miki between 1869 and 1882 the *Ofudesaki*, a book of revelations, contains 1,711 poems and is made up of seventeen chapters. The *Mikagura-uta*, or "Book of Sacred Songs," is a collection of songs she compiled to be sung in the holy service.

One of the factors that appeared to attract followers to Miki and to convince them of her divine favor was her power as a healer of the sick. To the many whom she had healed or who had become convinced of her divine status, Miki became known as a living goddess. Consistent with this hallowed title, Miki herself used the first person in revealing the will of "God the Parent" through her own writings and teachings. (*Ofudesaki*, I: 3) When she spoke of God Miki used two main titles, *Tsukihi* (Moon-Sun), and *Oyagami* (God the Parent). Her followers knew her herself as the Parent of the Divine model. As a result, in Tenrikyô teaching God is worshipped as "God the Parent," and Miki Nakayama, the shrine of God, is referred to as *Oyasama*, "worthy parent."

The main objective of this paper is to assess the impact of Miki Nakayama as a role model as well as the effect of her teaching upon the roles of women in Tenrikyô. In order to do so, however, it is essential first to examine Miki's status as the shrine of God and her teaching concerning God the Parent as presented in the two scriptures attributed to her.

Exactly what status are we to give to Miki's role as the shrine of God? Could it be that she was simply a channel for God's message, in the same way that in the Middle Ages in Europe female mystics claimed that, through visions, God used them as a channel for divine teaching. Or was Miki Nakayama making a claim for herself as the incarnation of God on earth in the same way that Jesus is claimed by Christians to have been God incarnate or as Ann Lee of the Shaker tradition was assumed to be the female Christ? According to Robert S. Ellwood, author of *Tenrikyô, A Pilgrimage Faith*, "the Japanese faith does not have a doctrine as precisely formulated as the Christian concept of the incarnation of the Second (or Third, in the case of Ann Lee) Person of the Trinity, but it has been concerned to show that in Tenrikyô experience God and *Oyasama* are inseparable and the manifestation of God through her continuous and complete." (Ellwood, 86)

In the *Ofudesaki* we are informed that "38 years ago, *Tsukihi* descended," (*Ofudesaki*, VII: 1) and that *Tsukihi* has "entered a body and speaks." (*Ofudesaki*, VIII: 50) We are also instructed that in entering into her, God borrowed Miki's mouth while she was lent God's mind. (*Ofudesaki*, XII: 67-8) One might conclude from this that Miki is not God, but rather a vehicle of God's revelation. And yet, a little later on in the *Ofudesaki* followers are warned not to underestimate Miki's status, "Listen! You are mistaken in thinking of Me as being human, the same as you." (*Ofudesaki*, VIII: 72) Traditional Tenrikyô teaching maintains that God the Parent did reside in *Oyasama* and that her teachings emanated from God, just as human life emanates from God. Moreover, when in 1887 Miki's life came to an end, her followers maintained that she had simply withdrawn from physical life while remaining alive in non-physical form. To this day she is thought to reside at the Foundress' sanctuary in the main worship center at Tenri city where she continues to teach the intention of "God the Parent." Pilgrims and worshippers come to the Foundress' shrine to pay their respects and to give offerings. In light of a promise made in the *Ofudesaki* concerning trouble free labor (*Ofudesaki* VII: 80) pregnant women in particular come to her shrine to enlist *Oyasama's* blessing for a

safe childbirth. Thus, not only was Miki Nakayama the voice of God during her physical life, but also she continues to this day to be the center of worship in the Tenrikyô faith.

It is perhaps inevitable that Miki's power to heal would lead some to consider her a living goddess, but for Tenrikyô practitioners her revolutionary teaching concerning our relationship to God is equally responsible for what led to the foundation of a new religious tradition in Japan. In the *Ofudesaki*, Miki presents *Tsukihi* as the one supreme deity: "The true and real God of this universe is *Tsukihi*. The others are all instruments." (*Ofudesaki*, VI: 50) *Tsukihi* is the creator of all else, including the traditional Gods of Japanese religion and by means of them, human life, "I drew forth Izanagi and Izanami and taught them the providence of how to begin human beings. At the origin were a fish and a serpent in the muddy ocean. I drew them up and began the first couple." (*Ofudesaki*, VI: 31-2)

The implied monotheism of these passages has intrigued scholars of religion, some of whom have attempted to find the source in the impact of western thought upon Japanese tradition in the late nineteenth century. More important for our purposes, however, is the symbolism of the designation *Tsukihi* (Moon-Sun) for God and its significance for Miki's interpretation of the nature of God as well as the act of creation. In the fragments of the creation account offered in the *Ofudesaki*, Miki appears consistently to appeal to pairs. *Tsukihi* is the pair: Moon-Sun, Izanami and Izanagi are the pair of traditional *Kami* (deities) of Shinto mythology (male and female respectively) used in the act of creation, a fish and a serpent become a pair: the first couple. Perhaps most significantly, "I began human beings, taking a fish and a serpent as seed and seedbed." (*Ofudesaki*, VI: 44) The pair of fish and serpent is used to begin human beings, who, in their turn as a pair, represent seed and seedbed. As will be shown later in this paper, the gender significance of the "pairs" symbolism used by Miki becomes vital to Tenrikyô teaching concerning male and female roles.

The parental image that becomes the focus of Miki's attention when she attempts to teach her followers about God and our relationship to our Divine Parent in the *Ofudesaki* is not blatantly infused with pair's symbolism. But Miki does eventually introduce a highly significant "pairs" symbolism to the concept of Divine Parent. Initially the divine image Miki presents to her followers is simply that of a Parent who tends to the needs of her children, "To God, people throughout the world are all My children.

All of you equally, know that I am your Parent.” (*Ofudesaki*, IV: 79) “The true Parent of this universe is *Tsukihi*. It is I who protect you in everything.” (*Ofudesaki*, VI: 102) Miki’s parenting God is a personal, nurturing God: “Because of My love for all my children, I exhaust My mind in every kind of way.” (*Ofudesaki*, IV: 62) Yet, eventually, the pair’s symbolism finds its way into Miki’s concept of God the Parent: “The earth and heaven of this world is your real Parent. Out of this, human beings were born.” (*Ofudesaki*, X: 54) Thus, not only is God Moon-Sun (*Tsukihi*), but also God is also heaven and earth, another symbolic pairing. This pair’s symbolism for the Divine has come to have immense significance for the Tenrikyô conception of God. Based upon Miki’s instructions, worship services in Tenrikyô involve the enactment of a sacred dance performed by male and female participants in equal numbers. The dance symbolizes the act of creation, and each of the participants represents God the Parent in one or other aspect. Thus, Miki instructs, “Among the ten performers of this service, there are those who take the role of the Parent of the beginnings of origin.” (*Ofudesaki*, VI: 30)

The *Mikagura Uta*, the second Tenrikyô scripture authored by Miki, is a collection of poems used as the text that informs the sacred dance. As well as reinforcing the conception of God proffered by Miki in the *Ofudesaki*, a highly suggestive passage in this scripture appears to set forth Miki’s understanding of the relationship between humans and God the Parent. Just as she has informed us in the *Ofudesaki* that the true parent is “heaven and earth,” so in the *Mikagura Uta* she informs us that, “Representing heaven and earth I have created husband and wife. This is the beginning of the world.” (*The Song for the Kagura, Mikagura-uta*) This analogy between God the Parent as heaven-and-earth and husband-and-wife as “representing heaven and earth” implies that husband and wife are created in the image of God and symbolize heaven and earth respectively. Even more significant, Tenrikyô interpretation has led to a two-way deduction of the analogy, such that husband and wife in turn symbolize dual aspects of God the Parent. In other words, Tenrikyô scholars have come to speak of a “oneness-in-two” in God the parent: husband and wife, or male and female as together integrated into the single nature of God.

Thus, it is claimed, when Miki speaks of God the Parent she is speaking of a God who unifies what are traditionally male and female elements into one single whole. Tenrikyô practitioners have concluded from this characterization of the divine that Miki advocated an androgynous

conception of God. Androgyny, literally defined, is the affirmation of both maleness and femaleness in one Being and not sex neutrality. Needless to say, if God is considered to be both male and female in Tenrikyô then this conception of the divine may have a major impact upon the roles of women as well as those of men in Tenrikyô. Our aim in what follows will be to assess the gender implications of Miki's status as the shrine of God and of her teaching concerning God the (androgynous) Parent in Tenrikyô tradition.

Tenrikyô practitioners are eager to highlight the positive and empowering role model that Miki Nakayama provided for women. Her status as the shrine of God gave her the authority and perhaps the courage to teach and emulate what were often revolutionary ideas and practices for women in her day. Not only was it an anomaly for a woman to be considered divinely inspired, it was also dangerous for a woman to be a religious leader in nineteenth century Japan. Miki was imprisoned several times by the Japanese authorities for her teaching and refusal to concede to the constraints placed upon her by the government of her day. Miki's status as the shrine of God provided her with ammunition with which to fight traditional notions of female inferiority in Japan. Repeatedly, in the *Ofudesaki* she implied that there was no distinction of social standing between men and women as far as doing the work of God is concerned. She spoke of men and women as trees, and claimed, "I do not say whether male pine or female pine. *Tsukihi* has an intention for any tree." (*Ofudesaki*, VII: 21)

For Shinbashira Shozen, Nakayama Miki's status as the shrine of God also gave her the authority to counter cultural as well as traditional religious teaching regarding women. Religion in practically every corner of the world has, at some time or another associated pollution, especially menstrual, with women and generally considered them inferior to men. Even women themselves have tended to regard menstruation as unclean, a shameful period "the trouble of the month." Citing anecdotes of the Foundress recorded by her followers, Miki argues that at no time did she teach that woman, or her menstruation, was a source of pollution. Instead, Miki maintained equality between men and women and characterized menstruation as a period of flowering preceding fruit bearing, "The world says woman is unclean, but there is nothing unclean about woman. Man and woman are equally children of God and there is no discrimination. Woman has a duty, a duty to bear children. Her monthly period is the

flower. Without the flower there is no fruit. Understand this well...To bear fruit without any flower is impossible. Ponder deeply. There is nothing unclean about it." (*Anecdotes*, 128) Removing what had been a religious and cultural stigma for women, and in particular one that had been a major excuse for the exclusion of women from roles of leadership and authority in religion and wider cultural traditions was a major achievement for Miki Nakayama. There can be little doubt that when she suggested that women and men are equally children of God and that there should be no discrimination between them that such teaching had an entirely positive impact upon the women around her.

Miki's teaching on equality for men and women with regard to the work of God has led to a situation in which many women today act as heads of Tenrikyô branch churches. These are women who take primary responsibility for the guidance of their congregations. Out of approximately 17,000 churches, over 4,000 churches have a female principle priest. Out of the total number of close to 100,000 priests, women occupy over 50%. Thus, the female is applauded within Tenrikyô tradition as an admirable means of the expansion of the faith. (These figures were provided by the Tenrikyô Overseas Mission Department, Tenri, 1994)

As the woman found worthy of use by God the Parent as the tool for exemplifying the path to human salvation and as a teacher, Miki Nakayama appears to have been an exemplary figure and role model. We shall now assess the extent to which her theological understanding of God the (androgynous) Parent was also potentially revolutionary. Accounts of androgynous deities are not uncommon in ancient religious traditions. In creation accounts such deities occasionally resulted from the fusion of two originally independent deities such as a sky father and an earth mother, or, alternatively, led to the creation of such gender specific deities. Androgyny is popularly supposed to stand for a kind of equality and balance between the sexes, a system in which both male and female bear equal responsibility. As such, it is considered an attractive alternative to patriarchal traditions, and in particular to androcentrism, according to which femaleness is seen in opposition to maleness and implicitly degraded. It can also, however, be an antidote to matriarchal traditions, in which male superiority is often simply replaced by female superiority. Androgyny is claimed by some to be an attempt to overcome the sexual antagonism that arises when patriarchies come into conflict with matriarchal systems.

Religious philosophies that advocate some form of androgynous God are also often applauded as philosophies that overcome the traditional dualisms to be found in patriarchal and matriarchal traditions. Making possible a transition towards a more holistic conception of divine nature, and consequently, of their relationship to the divine, and equality between male and female in human nature. Such a goal can, of course, only be achieved if what has traditionally been thought of as female (qualities such as compassionate and nurturing) are found to be not only qualities of leadership but qualities that inhere in men as well as women. Likewise, what has traditionally been thought of as male (qualities such as autonomy and rationality) are found to be not only qualities of leadership but also qualities that inhere in women as well as men. It is only with this kind of androgyny, whereby the genderizations of characteristics are broken down, that the dualisms that have been at the root of divisions between men and women in patriarchal and matriarchal traditions and in particular at the heart of androcentrism have any chance of being replaced by a new kind of androgynous holism.

Often, however, androgynous systems, far from breaking down detrimental genderizations of characteristics and qualities, represent an undesirable distortion of the male-female relationship. Androgynous concepts can, for instance, be used to affirm culturally acceptable values and gender roles that are based on an unequal distribution of power. Theories of androgyny can even encourage dualist conceptions that are detrimental to one, other or both sexes, especially when they presuppose the coincidence of gender opposites or of the merging of complementary gender opposites. An important consideration therefore, as we examine the evidence for androgyny in Miki's conception of God, will be whether or not such androgyny does in fact have equality implications for women in Tenrikyô, or whether it endorses cultural tendencies that are detrimental to or at least constraining so far as the roles of women are concerned.

The ideal of God as androgynous (male and female) Parent has become standard Tenrikyô teaching. Thus, "Since a parent is a father or a mother, the question may arise whether God the Parent is a father God, or if God the Parent is a generic name for the two. In fact this question is often asked. God the Parent is the one and only Being and is never a mother God or a father God, nor does God the Parent comprise two Gods. It is one Being who has the two fundamental functions of nurturing-that of the mother and that of the father. God the Parent is the only God who protects humans with

these two fundamental functions integrated by the principle of “oneness in two.” In this sense, God the Parent is truly the original Parent and the true and real Parent.” (*The Teachings and History of Tenrikyô*, 28) The consequences of this androgynous ideal for human parenting are well documented by Taketo Hashimoto in *Husbands and Wives, Parents and Children*. According to Taketo, “Androgyny is one of the symbols that expresses wholeness and perfectness.” (Taketo, 14) When speaking of parenting, he claims, “Usually the parent in actual life consists of a father and a mother. So the word should be ‘parents.’ The concept of ‘parent’ is the unification of paternity and maternity. When man becomes a parent in the true sense of the word, it does not mean that he becomes a father or she becomes a mother, but that he or she becomes the existence that unifies these two elements into one.” (Taketo, 19) Scholars such as Taketo maintain that Miki’s androgynous God ideal was also an equality ideal for men and women, affirming male and female as equal participants not only in parenting but also in the wider realm of the life of faith and religious practice. Taketo is eager to point out, however, that such equality does not imply that male and female become indistinguishable, but rather that, “two contrasting principles complement each other to produce a complete entity, while preserving their own distinct quality, as is true with two sounds in harmony.” (Taketo, 8)

It is precisely this idea of contrasting principles that complement each other that can mask traditional and potentially detrimental dualisms between male and female. The passages analyzed earlier in our examination of Miki’s teaching concerning God the Parent tend to have an androgynous (male and female) conception of God. *Tsukihi*, Moon-Sun, can be thought of in terms of male (moon) and female (sun). Moreover, the pairs that Miki utilizes in her account of creation in the *Ofudesaki* have male and female designations: *Izanagi* (male), *Izanami* (female), fish (male), serpent (female). These same male and female pairs, however, also tend to have dualistic conceptions of male and female, implicit within them is a potentially detrimental genderization of qualities or characteristics. This is shown most clearly with the symbolism of seed and seedbed as associated with fish (male) and serpent (female), respectively. The symbols of seed and seedbed have a very long history, in western as well as Asian religious traditions. As early as 6 BCE in Greek tradition, male was associated with seed and female with the seedbed. This pair made up one of the many pairs in the Pythagorean table of opposites, and was associated with other gender

associated characteristics and qualities, such as active (male) and passive (female), rational (male) and emotional (female).

Interpretations of Miki's pronouncements concerning human nature and the divine have led to the genderization of qualities and characteristics, not to mention behaviors in Tenrikyō. The extent to which this genderization of qualities and characteristics continues to have implications for the roles of men and women in Tenrikyō today is demonstrated by the following passage taken at length from Ian Reader's *Japanese Religions*. The passage concerns spiritual counseling offered by a Tenrikyō priest (Hisanori Konani) to a childless couple, "One day, a young couple came to visit me seeking advice. They confessed that they had decided to get a divorce after only one month of marriage. I was completely bewildered at this sudden decision, and as the husband explained I listened carefully. 'I became impotent on our wedding night and have been ever since, although I thought I had sexual capacity and desire before that night. We cannot understand why this strange occurrence has happened. And my wife, thinking that I have deceived her about my impotency, is very upset and angry with me. We have tried our best in various ways to make a normal married life, but it just has not worked out. So we have decided to get a divorce.' After the husband's statement, I considered this couple and their differences very carefully and came to this conclusion...God the Parent taught us that representing heaven as male and earth as female, He had created husband and wife. Nevertheless, in the above case the relationship between this husband and wife was quite contrary to that which God the Parent had intended. She was living spiritually in the sky and he, on the earth, and therefore this was not the natural and right situation to bring about rain. Because of such reversed stand in spirit, rain (the husband's affection) could not fall well to his wife. I said to them, 'As far as the sexual problem is concerned, you need not get a divorce. You got married because of your love for each other. Is this not true?' They agreed. 'I am going to tell you the intention of God the Parent in order that you may receive His divine grace. Please listen carefully.' I continued as follows: 'God the Parent had created the female spiritually and physically in order to take the role of *Kuni-toko* as the earth. And He gave to the male the divine name of *Kunitokotachi-no-Mikoto* and its role to stand (*tatsu, tachi*) on the base, which is the earth. Accordingly, the female is represented as the principle of the earth, and the male as heaven. Therefore, when at first having sex, it is natural that the man be on top, as heaven, and the woman be on bottom,

as the earth. No matter how aggressive a woman may be, at first she cannot be on the top. In your case, I believe that the position of heaven and earth is spiritually reversed. God the Parent says that at the time of the creation of mankind, He gave the divine grace of water to the prototype of man. The water, symbolizing one of the spiritual tendencies of men, is to flow into a lower direction. It should never rain from the earth to heaven. The problem which you are now facing is indeed as if the rain or water, which is the man's love, is incapable of falling onto the earth, which is the woman. If you both solemnly promise to God the Parent that throughout your lifetime you will live with the attitude of woman as the earth and man as heaven, God will be sure to manifest His blessing to you.' They replied that they would follow sincerely the divine principle of God the Parent. I then administered the Holy Grant (*sazuke*) on the husband. After the prayer, I invited them to stay for the night at my church and they did so. (The Holy Grant is a prayer to God the Parent asking for His divine protection.) The next morning, I asked the wife if there was any change in her husband. She shyly told me to ask her husband. The husband said to me: 'Such a tremendous miracle has happened to me...' and he smiled. Ten months and ten days later, a cute baby boy was born to the couple, and they now have two more children." (Reader, 138-9).

From the above it would appear that the fragments of Miki's teaching concerning God the Parent and the relationship between God and human beings as presented in the two scriptures authored by Miki have led Tenrikyô scholars to draw theological conclusions that reinforce differences in the roles of men and women in Tenrikyô. Shozen Nakayama, writing as Shinbashira in 1962, made it very clear that in Tenrikyô each sex has their own different function. Even though 'two are united into one' is a fundamental teaching, this means that, "both sexes, different in function yet co-operating with each other will perform the same task." (Shozen, 25) In this way, Shinbashira Nakayama echoes a very common refrain amongst Tenrikyô scholars who address the question of status and roles for male and female in Tenrikyô, "different roles, equal status."

It is far from clear, however, that equal status is preserved in the story recounted above. The underlying philosophy in this account of the couple that cannot manage to become pregnant assumes that the appropriate role for male is that of seed, and female that of seedbed, not to mention the inseparability of this pair with that of male as representing heaven and female as representing earth. The association of male with seed (active) and

female with seedbed (passive) has been common in many patriarchal societies, as has the association of men with reason and women with emotion. This association of specific characteristics and qualities with specific genders has often been used in arguments formulated to exclude women from education, from certain professions and from roles of leadership within religious institutions. The association of male with heaven and female with earth also has dubious implications. In western patriarchal traditions this kind of association has even led to the notion that men have higher spiritual capabilities than women. For these reasons alone, it is far from clear that equality of male and female is assumed either in Miki's conception of God the (androgynous) Parent or in her account of creation. In *Women in New Religions: In Search of Community, Sexuality and Spiritual Power*, Elizabeth Puttick claims,

“Often the founders of religion have had progressive, compassionate theories of gender, but these have been subverted by succeeding priesthoods and theologians who produce orthodoxies in line with socially entrenched sexism...one of the primary functions of successful religions may well have been the subordination of women to male authority.”
(Puttick, 175)

In the case of Miki Nakayama it seems clear that we have a woman who was in many ways a progressive. Her activity as a healer and helper of women in childbirth helped to liberate women from the blood taboos with which they were traditionally associated and by means of which they were often isolated. In this way, she may have helped to overcome the oppressive attitude of former religions concerning female sexuality. She also advocated equality between men and women both in creation and in salvation. Exemplifying the capabilities of women as autonomous and, especially as spiritual leaders, Miki Nakayama must have been a source of great encouragement to the women who flocked to Tenrikyô. Traditional stories suggest that she was always surrounded by women (i.e. daughters, granddaughters and practitioners of her faith).

According to Ulrike Wöhr, Miki Nakayama would have been disappointed by some of the more patriarchal tendencies that have taken root in Tenrikyô since her death. In *Frauen und die Neue Religionen*, Wöhr argues that Miki had hoped that her youngest daughter, Kokan (who she did not appear to want to marry and sent off to engage in missionary activity in

Osaka) would become her successor. Unfortunately, Kokan died before her mother. It is notable that the line of successors since the passing of the Foundress has been entirely male. Male *Shinbashiras* (spiritual and administrative leaders of Tenrikyô) were rapidly accompanied in Tenrikyô by the tradition of male inheritance of house churches. Thus, even though today Tenrikyô boasts many female priests, tradition still supports the passing of head churches from father to son.

One must wonder, however, if in some part the explanation for the patriarchal tendencies that have taken root in Tenrikyô since Miki's death can be attributed to Miki's inability to move beyond some, if not all, traditional gender stereotypes. If Miki did in crucial ways help to expand the roles and enhance the status of the women around her, she was nevertheless a woman of her day, with some of the traditional conceptions of male and female steeped deep within her theological mind-frame. As liberating as her conception of the androgyny of God the Parent might have been for the relationships between men and women in Tenrikyô, Miki did not seem able to take advantage of the tools within her theological framework for deconstructing the patriarchal genderization of qualities, characteristics and roles that have proven detrimental to women. What may appear as potentially revolutionary doctrines and behaviors may have had an easy home in the environment from which Miki came. Shaman tradition, in which female possession is typical, must provide at least one possible explanation for the role of Miki as healer and as one possessed by the divine. Added to which, Miki's use of sun and moon as characteristics of the divine were far from novel. As Carl Becker points out in "Concepts and Roles of God in Tenrikyô," the use of sun and moon as deific figures was neither new nor unique to Miki Nakayama. And of course, the dialectic between male and female, heaven and earth, as used by Miki echoes the polarizations of the Yin-Yang philosophy of earlier eastern traditions, not to mention the 6 BCE Pythagorean Table of Opposites. If indeed Miki was attributing androgyny to God, this may well have come from the conjunction of matriarchal traditions in Japan with patriarchal cultures that seeped into Japan from Confucianist China.

To mention these things is not in any way to detract from the significant role Miki Nakayama played in nineteenth century Japan. Rather, we might find great meaning in some of the traditions from which she is able to draw for her religious philosophy. It is perhaps thanks to a shared culture in which the high God of the indigenous Shinto tradition is female

and the high priests at the Ise shrine are women, as well as a shared history, in which there had been female emperors, that a woman like Miki Nakayama, and others like her who founded new religious movements in the nineteenth century, could live and grow and have their being. It is also perhaps women like Miki Nakayama who serve as constant reminders to Japan, a country that seems at times to suffer from amnesia with regard to its matriarchal history, that women are resilient beings who have not, do not and will not accept religious, political or social subversion.

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