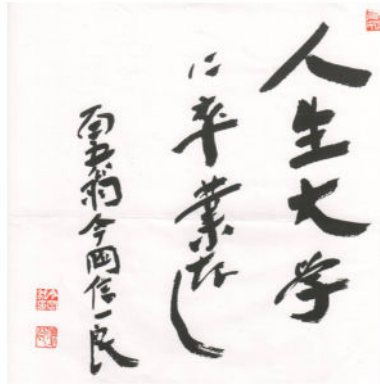


# Free-Religion

( 自由宗教 *jiyū shūkyō* )

*A Japanese  
Unitarian (ユニテリアン) Perspective*

Imaoka Shin'ichirō (1881–1988)



*"In the university of human life there is no graduation."*

*Calligraphy by IMAOKA Shin'ichirō*

*Selected texts by Imaoka Shin'ichirō (1881–1988),  
in draft translations by Andrew James Brown.  
Printed to accompany a short talk for the British Chapter of the  
International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) given at the  
General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches  
Birmingham, April 12th 2025*

## Contents

A note about two key terms used in this pamphlet	3
What kind of church ( <i>kyōkai</i> ) is Kiitsu Kyokai? [1959]	4
What is Free-Religion [1963]	7
My Principles of Living (Revised) [August 1973]	13
Kiitsu's Faith [1980]	15
My Principles of Living—Revised Again (Tentative) [1981]	19



*Imaoka Shin'ichirō in 1930 (aged 49), five years after becoming Principal of Seisoku Academy, whilst teaching at Nihon University, assisting Anesaki Masaharu at the University of Tokyo, and about to begin working on a study of Shinto with J. W. T. Mason.*

## A note about two key terms used in this pamphlet

### 1. *Free-Religion* — *jiyū shūkyō*

“Free-religion” is a translation of the Japanese term *jiyū shūkyō* (自由宗教). Although “free-religion” is a perfectly acceptable translation, it should always be understood more expansively to mean something like, “a dynamic, creative, inquiring, free and liberative religion or spirituality.” In Imaoka Shin’ichirō-sensei’s understanding, free-religion was a universal ideal, yet not an absolute. It was a term indicating something beyond conventional belief and religion, beyond Theism, Liberalism, Unitarianism, Humanism or, indeed, any “-ism”—something that has the power to transform a person into what he called an authentic “cosmic” or “universal” human being (宇宙人). It’s important to be aware that the *kyō* (教 teaching/faith) of *jiyū shūkyō* is the same *kyō* (教) of *Kiitsu Kyōkai*.

### 2. *Kiitsu Kyōkai* — *Returning-to-One Fellowship*

*Kiitsu Kyōkai* (帰一教会 or 帰一教會) was the name of Imaoka-sensei’s post-1948 free-religious community in Tokyo. *Kiitsu* (帰一) means “returning-to-one,” and *kyōkai* (教会) means “church” or “congregation.” In general—though not exclusively—in Japanese, *kyōkai* (教会) refers to a *Christian* church. For this reason, *Kiitsu Kyōkai* has often been translated as “Unitarian Church.” However, a better translation is, “Returning-to-One Fellowship.” This matters because Imaoka-sensei’s community was always more than simply a *church*, even a *Unitarian* Church. It was, instead, a free-religious gathering in which, through the practise of Seiza Meditation (Quiet Sitting), talks, free and rational inquiry, mutual discovery, learning and conversation, Imaoka-sensei hoped to create a community that would unite (*kiitsu*) all its members in the common cause of creating a more just, equitable, beautiful, and humane society (*kyōkai*) that did not make a hard and fast distinction between the sacred the secular. More than just a church or temple, *Kiitsu Kyōkai* was also a “school” or “institute” for the study of free-religion. In his manuscripts, and on their noticeboard outside the hall at Seisoku Academy (where he served as Principal from 1925 to 1973), he tried to indicate all this by using an older combination of *kanji* (Chinese characters) for *kyōkai* (教會 rather than 教会), thus writing the name as 帰一教會. He chose to do this because, in Confucian contexts, which emphasised communal learning and moral/ethical cultivation, 會 (*kai*) was used in terms that referred to gatherings concerned with the mutual exchange of ideas rather than the passing on of fixed doctrines.

Andrew James Brown

## **What kind of church (*kyōkai*) is Kiitsu Kyokai? [1959]**

*(January, 1959—in “Creation” magazine, Issue 86)*

Even though ten years have passed since its establishment, Kiitsu Kyōkai has not yet fully formalised itself as a church (*kyōkai*). Although it continues to meet on Sundays throughout the year, it has not been very successful. It remains unclear whether there even exist members or those who call themselves followers. Under such circumstances, the common opinion is that the church (*kyōkai*) will probably disappear in time, and as the one responsible, I sincerely feel sorry for this situation. However, from my perspective, before creating an organisation, the foremost issue was to examine the character and quintessence of the free-religion we advocate. Thus, the past ten years have been a period of experimentation for this church (*kyōkai*). Given this, after a decade of seeking the way and examination, have I fully grasped the core of free-religion? Certainly not. I still see myself as nothing more than a seeker on the path and I am by no means a shepherd guiding a flock of lost sheep. My experiment must continue from now on as well. However, I believe I have at least reached a state of mind in which I can put my experiments into practice whilst still experimenting. Therefore, I will now set forth my personal views on free-religion and my perspective on Kiitsu Kyōkai and humbly seek corrections from those more knowledgeable than myself.

Free-religion is a religion that thoroughly emphasises freedom. It not only refuses to be bound by fixed dogmas or rituals, but it even advocates for liberation from the authority of a founder. Therefore, it is neither so-called Buddhism nor so-called Christianity. It emphasises freedom, autonomy, and creativity. Rather than focusing on reaching a final destination, it values the process of progress and development.

Even the religion of Jesus and the religion of Shakyamuni were, in fact, neither so-called Christianity nor so-called Buddhism. The religion of Jesus was not the doctrine of the Trinity or the theory of atonement preached by later Christianity, but was simply the gospel of creative love. Likewise, the awakening of Shakyamuni under the Bodhi tree was by no means limited to the Four Noble Truths or the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination. Rather, it was the

fundamental principle of creative evolution, which manifests in infinitely adaptive and transformative ways. I believe that this Dharma can even be interpreted as Humanism. This kind of non-dogmatic, highly flexible religion is precisely the free-religion that we uphold. However, later Christians and Buddhists confined the ever-evolving spiritual life within the boundaries of dogma, ritual, and religious authority. The essential task, therefore, is to return these ossified, formalised established religions to their original sources and revive them with free and creative life. In other words, to transform orthodox Christianity and fixed Buddhism into Free-Christianity and Free-Buddhism. However, if Free-Christianity and Free-Buddhism are fully to embody true “freedom”, then there is no need to cling to traditional labels such as Christianity or Buddhism. It would be sufficient simply to call it free-religion. Thus, through our Kiitsu Kyōkai, we have sought to create a thoroughgoing example of free-religion.

Since both Jesus and Shakyamuni were great figures of free-religion, we must learn much from both sages with an attitude of reverence and humility. However, there is absolutely no need to limit ourselves solely to Jesus and Shakyamuni. We must learn just as much from Augustine, Luther, and Schweitzer, as well as from Ryōkan, Shinran, and Gandhi. Even the Orthodox Christianity and fixed-Buddhism, which were provisionally rejected earlier, if we survey them from a broad historical perspective, and regard them all as steps in the process of evolution, then I think there is also something to be learned from them.

From the perspective that the process of progress is more important than the final destination, we should not hastily rank polytheism, monotheism, theism, impersonal conceptions of God—a type of atheism—or even spiritualism in terms of superiority or inferiority, or of higher and lower.

Therefore, at Kiitsu Kyōkai, we include not only Christianity and Buddhism, but also Shintō, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and all other faiths. However, this does not mean that all religions are unconditionally unified. Noise and harmony must be distinguished. For different religions truly to converge, they must refine one another. Thus, all religions must first become free-religions. That is

to say, doctrines, rituals, and religious institutions within various religions should not be regarded as ultimate or absolute, but rather as secondary and symbolic, shaped by the conditions of time and environment. The essential task is to awaken to what lies beyond these dogmas and symbols.

I often hear critical remarks that the Kiitsu Kyōkai lacks creeds, scriptures, pastors, and priests, making it too vague and difficult to grasp. And indeed, such a criticism is perfectly reasonable. However, since the quintessence of religion lies in grasping the great life of free and selfless creative evolution, such matters are simply peripheral details. That being said, just because they are peripheral does not mean they are entirely unnecessary. So, at some point, our church (*kyōkai*) should also should also organise and put in order these kinds of things.

From the standpoint of Kiitsu Kyōkai—a faith that is free, tolerant, universal, and all-embracing—the Buddhist scriptures, the Bible, the Qur'an, the Vedas, and even Kiitsu Kyōkai's own sacred texts<sup>1</sup> must all be regarded as equally sacred. Likewise, all the saints and sages of East and West, past and present, should be respected as spiritual forebears of Kiitsu Kyōkai. Some may argue that this makes for too many scriptures and too many spiritual forebears, but this is the same mistake as going to a cafeteria and thinking one must eat every single dish available. No matter how broad-minded Kiitsu Kyōkai may be, it would never force someone to overeat. The only point Kiitsu Kyōkai emphasises is that one must not be a picky eater.

.

---

<sup>1</sup> Imaoka-sensei is likely thinking here of texts by people such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Haynes Holmes, and, perhaps, also those by Henri Bergson.

## **What is Free-Religion [1963]**

*(December, 1963—from “Religion and the Modern World”)*

### *1. Free-Religion in the Modern Era*

Free-religion arose as a resistance against the fixed institutions, doctrines, traditions and rituals of established religions. In modern religious history, Unitarianism, Universalism, and Bahá'ism are among the most notable examples of this movement. The first two—Unitarianism and Universalism—were religious reform movements that emerged within Western Christianity between the 18th and 19th centuries. However, at first, these movements were reforms within Christianity, and they did not seek to go beyond Christianity itself. In contrast, Bahá'ism was a movement that arose in Persia in the mid-19th century. It did not simply aim to reform Islam in Persia, but rather, sought to transcend all specific religions worldwide. With this distinguishing feature, Bahá'ism began as the most radically free-religion.

Last summer [1961], on my return journey from attending the World Free Religion Conference [i.e. the World Congress of the International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom] held in Switzerland, I made a special visit to Israel. One of my primary objectives was to visit the headquarters of the aforementioned Bahá'í Faith, located in Haifa, a city in northern Israel, as a model of the most radically free-religion. However, according to my travel schedule, the day of my visit to Haifa happened to fall on a Saturday, which is the Sabbath in Judaism. While I was aware in advance that Saturday is a holy day in Israel, I had not expected that all transportation services would be completely suspended on that day. As a result, in the end, I had no choice but to abandon my plan to visit Haifa, which was deeply regrettable. However, at the time, my friend in East Jerusalem firmly declared that, “A powerless and insignificant religious organisation like the Bahá'í Faith is not worth the trouble of going out of your way to visit.” I was surprised that my friend adopted an attitude that seemed almost to mock my disappointment. Since my friend is not the type of person to make irresponsible remarks, his statement made me reflect seriously. In fact, even now, I continue to think about this

matter. Could it be that the Bahá'í Faith, which originally emerged as a free-religion or a transcendent non-specific religion, has over time become a fixed, restrictive religion due to the existence of a structured organisation? In a related development, Unitarianism and Universalism today appear to be ceasing to exist as free-religions in their original forms. Why is this? It is because these groups are, themselves, now attempting to transcend Unitarianism and Universalism. In fact, both religious organisations officially merged last May [1961] and declared that they are no longer necessarily Christian denominations. For now, they continue to call themselves the Unitarian Universalist Association, but before long, I suspect they will completely discard such an outdated name.

## *2. The Characteristics of Free-Religion*

Admittedly, a fixed organisation or form cannot be considered a free-religion. However, if that is the case, does free-religion exist separately from organisation and form? No, free-religion is by no means such a ghostly, intangible thing. Religion itself and the organisation of religion can, of course, be distinguished within our minds. And indeed, it may be necessary to distinguish them. However, in reality, the two are inseparably connected. A so-called religion that possesses no organisation or form remains merely an idea and can never become a living religion that offers salvation to people. While it cannot be said that organisation and form are themselves religion, a religion that lacks them is also inconceivable. It would be wrong to disregard organisation and form or, conversely, to overemphasise them—both are errors.

Religion can be compared to life. Life is something that continually develops and evolves, never ceasing to grow. Yet, in the process of its development, it always takes on some form. There is no such thing as life without form. Accordingly, this form undergoes change, shedding of its old state, and undergoes metabolism/renewal; it is by no means something that is eternally fixed or immutable. It is said that the human body undergoes a complete renewal every seven years. Forms, when considered as temporary, are provisional. However, just because something is provisional or temporary, that does not mean its value should be disregarded. No matter how fleeting something may be, at its given moment, it remains



indispensable and the most essential form it can take. Accordingly, the concept of free-religion, which I am discussing in this essay, is nothing less than the fundamental and holistic unfolding of human nature. For this reason, it is even more vital than biological life itself. It is dynamic, creative, and autonomous. It continually sheds its old skin, undergoes metabolic renewal, and grows and develops endlessly. This is nothing other than what Christ referred to as eternal life. From the beginning, all true religion has been of this nature. Free-religion is, in fact, true-religion itself. However, both in the past and the present, there have been far too many conservatives and traditionalists who have taken such a dynamic religion and rendered it static. They have frozen forms that should have been temporary and relative, making them into something eternal and absolute. Because of this, we have no choice but to raise the banner of free-religion.

### *3. Advocates of Free-Religion in World Religious History*

As stated earlier, Unitarianism and Universalism have already shed their former identities as “Unitarians” or “Universalists” and continue, even today, to demonstrate the dignity of being pioneers of the Free-Religion Movement in America (or, indeed, the world). However, the Free-Religion Movement is by no means exclusively theirs. One must not overlook the fact that before them, and outside of the Western world as well, numerous Free-Religion Movements have existed. That is to say the founder of the Quakers, George Fox, was a distinguished free-religionist in 17th-century England. Martin Luther was a great free-religionist of 16th-century Germany. Even within medieval Catholicism, the group of mystics were outstanding free-religionists.

In Japan, so-called Kamakura Buddhist leaders such as Shinran, Dōgen, and Nichiren were each distinctive free-religionists. In 19th-century India, Ram Mohan Roy, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda were free-religionists who, despite their Indian identity, were also global and modern figures. By the same token, Shakyamuni Buddha and Christ were, in fact, the greatest free-religionists. Shakyamuni Buddha, in his final words to his disciples, said: “You must make yourself a light and rely on yourself alone, without relying on others; make the Dharma your light and rely on Dharma, without relying on

others.” In other words, Shakyamuni forbade his disciples from viewing him as a religious founder, instead urging them to fully develop their own autonomy and creativity. Similarly, Christ left his disciples with the words: “Truly, truly, I say to you: Those who believe in me will also do the works that I do; and even greater works than these will they do.” Shakyamuni and Christ alike both expected and wished for their disciples to surpass them, and neither of them ever intended to establish an institutionalised religious organisation labeled as Buddhism or Christianity with themselves as its founders.

#### *4. Free-Religion and the Unity of All Religions*

In Japan, the Free-Religion Movement is often regarded as identical to the movement for the unity of all religions, but this is a misunderstanding. As is clear from tracing its historical development, the Free-Religion Movement has always contained an element of protest or resistance. However, it goes without saying that its purpose is not resistance for its own sake. Rather, its resistance is meaningful precisely because it is an expression of universal and creative human nature. A fish in a tank cannot help but leap out; only by leaping out can it swim leisurely in a pond or river filled with water. Thus, harmony and unity must always presuppose opposition or resistance. Even if there is such a thing as the unity of all things, I do not believe that it can exist apart from the conflicts and contradictions between different religions. Peace alone is not a sufficient reason to accept compromise or underhand deals. It is precisely in the place where we thoroughly contend over matters that ought rightly to be contended, that a higher-order and truer harmony and universality are realised. From the standpoint of free-religion, indiscriminately endorsing or revering anything and everything that is called “religion” is not necessarily a virtue.

#### *5. Free-Religion and the Layperson*

Free-religion is an autonomous and creative eternal life, and as already mentioned, it always involves some organisation and form. However, while these organisations and forms are not immutable and should evolve with the times, the question remains whether they should be limited to what is conventionally regarded as sacred—such

as religious institutions, doctrines, rituals, and other religious practices. It is generally considered that the realms of politics and economics are secular and non-religious, but is that truly the case? There are instances where actions labeled as “religious” are, at times, more worldly than political actions. Conversely, there are times when economic actions are more sincere than what is traditionally considered religious practice. When comparing the life-and-death struggles of politicians and industrialists in the real world with the religious practices of professional clergy in temples and churches, it can even feel like a serious battle versus a bamboo sword sparring match. As long as it involves the fundamental expression and development of human nature, all human activities are sacred and religious, are they not? “Ordinary mind is the Way,” and all laypeople are also clergy. The existence of professional (vocational) clergy is rather secondary in significance. Thus, Erich Fromm, pointing out that even among non-clerics, there exist true religious individuals, lists figures such as Condorcet, Saint-Simon and Comte in France; Fichte, Hegel, and Marx in Germany; and Paine, Jefferson, and Franklin in America. From the standpoint of free-religion, this is something that resonates deeply. However, if that happens, the distinction between the secular and the sacred will disappear, and if politics and economics are considered religion, one might argue that it would be simpler and more convenient to abolish the term “religion” altogether. However, I am not saying that politics and economics in themselves are religion. For them to be religion they must represent an ultimate unfolding of human nature. If that is the case, what, indeed, could connect mere politics and economics to such ultimate things? Existing religious organisations and professional clergy are truly in a position to play such a mediating role. They only hold meaning when they serve that function. However, at times, politics and economics may, without the guidance of religious organisations or professional clergy, deepen their own self-examination and ultimately reach the realm of religion. There may be moments when professional clergy fail to comprehend such ideals within actual reality—such as the sacred within the secular, the light within the darkness. Therefore, it must be understood that there are two kinds of religion: religion in the narrow sense, which is generally recognised as religion, and religion in the broad sense, which is not typically considered religion. It is this latter, broader meaning of religion (which naturally encompasses the narrower

definition) that is true free-religion. It spreads across the entirety of human activity and resides within it. From the perspective of free-religion, politics, economics, and culture are not merely applications of religious beliefs but are themselves sacred religious activities. (However, this way of thinking does not contradict the concept of the separation of church and state, which is a common principle in modern nations.) Ultimately, free-religion is more a religion of laypeople than of specialists. Indeed, are laypeople not, in some cases, even more profoundly religious than professional clergy?

## **My Principles of Living (Revised) [August 1973]** (August, 1973—in “Free Religion” Magazine)

“My Principles of Living” (Revised) consisting of seven articles was first formulated in February of 1965 as my personal statement of faith. However, over time, and with the support and feedback from the members of the Tokyo Kiitsu Kyokai and others, it became a practice for the congregation to recite it together at Sunday gatherings, a custom that has continued to the present day. However, since then, I have increasingly felt the need to declare reverence toward nature as the fundamental source of human existence and the root of life. Therefore, a new article has been added after the fourth article in the revised version below, resulting in a total of eight articles. The concept of “freedom” in free-religion fundamentally refers to inner personal freedom and places the highest value on it. Therefore, these principles of living do not in any way impose constraints on members. However, I hope that they may serve as a reference for those who wish to create their own principles of living. In this spirit, I would like to invite not only feedback on the new fifth article but also careful consideration and critique of them all.

**1. I place trust/have faith in myself.** I become aware of my own subjectivity and creativity,<sup>2</sup> and feel the worth of living in life. Subjectivity and creativity<sup>3</sup> can also be expressed as personality, divinity, and Buddha-nature.

**2. I place trust/have faith in my neighbour.** A neighbour is oneself as a neighbour. If I place trust/have faith in myself, I inevitably place trust/have faith in my neighbour.

**3. I place trust/have faith in a cooperative society.** Both oneself and a neighbour, while each possessing a unique personality, are not things that exist in isolation. Because of this uniqueness, a true interdependence, true solidarity, and true human love are established, and therein a cooperative society is realised.

---

<sup>2</sup> In later years he adds “sociality” to this list.

<sup>3</sup> See n. 1

**4. I place trust/have faith in the trinity of self, neighbour, and cooperative society.** The self, neighbour, and cooperative society, while each having a unique personality, are entirely one. Therefore, there's no differentiation of precedence or of superiority or inferiority between them, and one always contains the other.

**5. I place trust/have faith in the unity of life and nature.** Life, which consists of the trinity of self, neighbour, and cooperative society, further unites and merges with all of existence—heaven, earth, and all things.

**6. I place trust/have faith in the church (*kyōkai*).** The church (*kyōkai*) is the prototype/archetype and motivating power of the cooperative society. I can only be myself by being a member of the church (*kyōkai*).

**7. I place trust/have faith in a specific religion.** In other words, I am a member of the Tokyo Kiitsu Kyōkai. However, a specific religion — including the Tokyo Kiitsu Kyōkai — neither monopolises religious truth nor is it the ultimate embodiment of it.

**8. I place trust/have faith in free-religion.** While having faith in a specific religion, the endless pursuit and improvement towards universal and ultimate truth is the core of religious life. Such a dynamic religion is called a free-religion.

## Kiitsu's Faith [1980]

(November, 1980, *A Sunday Meeting Talk at Kiitsu Kyōkai*  
—in “Mahoroba” Magazine)

Since its founding in 1948, this church (*kyōkai*) has called itself Kiitsu Kyōkai. Let us consider the origin and meaning of the term “Kiitsu.” One connection traces back to the Unitarian movement, which came to Japan in 1887 and was active until around the time of the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923. Unitarianism is a minority branch of Christianity that rejects the doctrine of the Trinity, which is a core tenet of Christianity. It asserts that Jesus was not God but a human being, and that God is one—a unity. This rationalist, liberal movement had a place of worship in Tokyo known as Unity Hall. Another origin of the term “Kiitsu” is linked to the Association Concordia,<sup>4</sup> which was active from the late Meiji period until around the beginning of the Pacific War. This organisation was founded by Anesaki [Masaharu]-sensei and figures such as Shibusawa Eiichi. It was a cultural association with the aim of uniting/returning-to-one [*kiitsu*] the ideals and cultures of East and West. Naturally, religion was also included in this vision.

Since I was involved in both of these movements, after the war, when the remaining Yunitarians gathered to establish this Kiitsu Kyōkai, we chose the name Kiitsu partly out of a desire to carry forward aspects of both traditions. However, our understanding of Kiitsu carries a completely unique and new meaning, which is also reflected in the “Principles of Living that we have just recited together [see “My Principles of Living (Revised)” (August 1973) on pp. 13 and 14].

First, let us consider the fourth article, which states: “I place trust/ have faith in the trinity of self, neighbour, and cooperative society.” Although each of us possesses an independent personality and individuality, in our essential existence, we are one with our neighbours. Thus, we are bound to form a cooperative society. This cooperative society begins with the family, expands to local regions,

---

<sup>4</sup> In Japanese this was also called Kiitsu Kyōkai, but it used a different combination of characters for *kyōkai* (協会) than was used in the name of Imaoka Shin'ichirō's post-1948 Kiitsu Kyōkai (教会 or 教會). See introductory note to this pamphlet.

then to the nation, and ultimately must be realised as a global human community. Movements such as the World Federalist Movement, as well as the World Community Declaration by our International Association of Religious Freedom, along with numerous world peace initiatives, all arise from this fundamental idea of the unity of humankind.

The fifth article states that we place trust/have faith in the unity of life and nature. It is the belief that heaven, earth, and the self share a common root, and that all things are one with us.

The seventh article affirms the principle of adhering to a specific religion. This means that whether one follows Buddhism, Christianity, or Shinto, each person may maintain their specific religious affiliation while still participating in free-religion and Kiitsu Kyōkai, without any conflict. However, it is essential that we reject sectarian exclusivity and religious conflict, where one believes their own religion alone holds absolute truth. Instead, we should work together with the attitude expressed in the saying: “Though the paths by which the dragons ascend may differ, all gaze upon the same moon from the lofty peak.” In this sense, we affirm the principle of “the many returning to the one” (*kiitsu*). It is a unity within diversity. This does not mean erasing differences or reducing everything to a single system. Rather, we recognise and respect the existence of diverse individual identities, while seeking common ground and working together in cooperation.

In this sense, the eight article—we place trust/have faith in free-religion—is of great importance. Its annotation states: “While having faith in a specific religion, the endless pursuit and improvement towards universal and ultimate truth is the core of religious life. Such a dynamic religion is called a free-religion.” The core belief and guiding principle of Kiitsu Kyōkai does not reside merely in doctrines, theological principles, or articles of faith. Rather, it is about grasping the essence of life. It is not something static, but something in motion—boundless self-cultivation, boundless spiritual pursuit. It is a movement that never ceases, yet within it, there is an ever-unfolding and dynamically consistent growth. That is what we call the unity of life. If unity with one’s neighbour and humankind, as well as unity with nature and the cosmos, can be considered



horizontal unification, then this is vertical unification. Some people criticise free-religion as lacking coherence or a clear focal point—as if it is merely an unstructured collection of various elements. But that is not true. There is unity both horizontally and vertically. There is a living focal point.

In other words, unity with all humankind and unity with the vast cosmos and great nature is one great life force that has ceaselessly advanced and developed from infinite past to infinite future. And within this great life force, I myself am included. Thus, this vast, eternal history of life itself is also my body, my biography. This is what is meant by Kiitsu.

According to physiologists, our bodies are composed of approximately 35 billion cells, and while these cells undergo renewal and replacement every few years, they still function as a unified whole, constantly working together. In the same way, I believe that we ourselves are like cells within the vast, infinite life of the entire universe and all humankind. Though our existence may be tiny and fleeting, in reality, we are integrated and one with this infinite, eternal great life. We each have a role to play in the unfolding of this great life and contribute to it in some way. Thus, even though our individual existence is small and fleeting, we are able to partake in the greatness and eternity of life itself.

When thinking in this way, studying astronomy, biology, Japanese and world history, and geography all become forms of studying oneself. If one reads Japanese history and world history as though they were one's own autobiography, they become deeply fascinating. Though I have taken up lifelong learning at the age of one hundred, it comes rather late. With my declining physical strength and eyesight I can no longer study as thoroughly as I would like, but as long as I can still read, I intend to continue. In the university of life, there is no graduation.

Recently, I have been reading about ancient Japanese history. Texts such as the *Kojiki*, *Nihon Shoki*, and *Fudoki* are now available in convenient paperback editions, making them easy to obtain, so I have collected and read various volumes. However, there are also foreign texts that were written a thousand years before the *Kojiki*, which

mention Japan. According to these sources, the origins of the Japanese people lie in Mesopotamia, and Japan's gods are said to have come through the Silk Road, migrating from ancient Babylon and Egypt, as well as the broader Middle East. As I am only an amateur [historian], I cannot determine how much of this is historical fact, but I do not think it is entirely impossible.

At any rate, humankind is a vast cosmic life force, which has grown and evolved endlessly from the depths of antiquity to the distant future. Since I, too, am one with this great life force, even though my individual physical existence has an endpoint, the life of my being, which is connected to the cosmic great life force, is eternal. In my daily life, I am entirely alone. I have no particular hobbies or amusements, and my days are exceedingly simple. However, because I believe that each and every day, each and every moment holds eternal meaning, I continue my personal efforts. Thus, I feel neither boredom nor loneliness. This is my life of Kiitsu—my life of returning-to-one.

## **My Principles of Living — Revised Again (Tentative) [1981]** (September, 1981)

1. **I affirm myself**  
I am aware of my own subjectivity, creativity and sociality, and feel the worth of living in life through them.  
Subjectivity, creativity and sociality can also be expressed as personality, divinity, and Buddha-nature.
2. **I affirm others**  
Others are neighbours who possess their own selves as others. By affirming myself, I inevitably affirm/trust others.
3. **I affirm the cooperative society**  
Neither self nor others exist in isolation or self-sufficiency; instead, they inevitably establish a mutual interdependency, solidarity, and a cooperative society.
4. **I affirm the trinity of self, others, and cooperative society**  
The self, others, and the cooperative society, while each possessing unique individualities, unite into one (*kiitsu*).  
Therefore, there is no precedence or superiority among them; each always presupposes the other two.
5. **I affirm the universal/cosmic cooperative society**  
The trinity of self, others, and the cooperative society further unites with heaven and earth and all things, to form a universal/cosmic cooperative society.
6. **I affirm the church (*kyōkai*)**  
The church (*kyōkai*) is a microcosm of the universal/cosmic cooperative society. I can only be myself by being a member of the church (*kyōkai*).

**Addendum:** I interpret the above faith as free-religion and, as a free-religionist, together with my companions, I belong to the Tokyo Kiitsu Kyōkai, the Japan Free Religion Association, and the International Association for Religious Freedom. However, free-religion is neither opposed to established religions nor does it seek to integrate them. Instead, it aims to grasp and realise the essence and

ideals, not only of various religions, but also all human activities. Therefore, these principles are nothing other than the attitude of life I always wish constantly to maintain.



*Imaoka Shin'ichirō in 1965 (aged 84), standing in front of his wife's company after receiving the Order of the Sacred Treasure, 4th Class, the second of his two Imperial awards. The Award of 1965 honours individuals who have made significant contributions to public affairs or have dedicated many years to public service. Imaoka-sensei's wife, Utayo, was herself a remarkable figure who played an important role in the early Japanese feminist movement. She also won two Imperial awards, in her case for her accomplishments in business. It was one of her companies that put the first Japanese communications satellite into orbit.*

For more information please contact:

Andrew James Brown

[caute.brown@gmail.com](mailto:caute.brown@gmail.com)

<https://andrewjbrown.blogspot.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/@andrewjamesbrown4098>