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GHENT UNIVERSITY

“CLEANSING THE UNIVERSE”  
(UCHŪ NO MISOGI):  
RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM AND SPIRITUAL  
TRAINING IN PRE-WAR *AIKIDŌ*

IMAP LECTURE (VIA ZOOM)

REGISTRATION REQUIRED: [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/AIKIDO-NIEHAUS](https://tinyurl.com/aikido-niehaus)

FEBRUARY 17, 2021

17:00-18:30 PM

JAPAN STANDARD TIME

*Aikidō* nowadays is globally taught and practiced as a sport and a philosophy of life. However, this interpretation of *aikidō* is the result of a post-WWII process, in which *aikidō* under the guidance of the Aikikai Headquarter was reinvented, and to a certain extent ‘de-religified’ and ‘de-ideologized’. When Ueshiba Morihei (1883-1969) first developed *aikidō* in the 1920s he was highly influenced by the syncretistic shintō sect Ōmoto-kyō and incorporated teachings and practice of this new religion into his martial art. In this lecture I will analyse how Ueshiba in (auto)biographical writings is established as a charismatic religious leader and medium—and ultimately as a living god. In a second step, I will analyse primary sources that define the practice of *aikidō* and the performance of its “heavenly techniques” (*kamuwaza*) as ritual acts, which connect practitioner and gods in order to transform the world. Finally, the teachings of *aikidō* will be contextualized within the contemporary political climate and (ultra)nationalist as well as imperialistic ideology. An approach that critically addresses the religious dimensions in the teachings of Ueshiba Morihei is relevant within the most recent trend in Japan to revitalize religious aspects of *aikidō* devoid of their historical and ideological meaning.

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