

REVIEW



Horie Norichika 堀江宗正, *Poppu supirichuariti, Media ka sareta shūkyōsei* ポップスピリチュアリティ・メディア化された宗教性 [Pop Spirituality and the Mediatization of Religiosity]

Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2019. 322 pages. Hardcover, ¥2,750.
ISBN 978-4-00-061372-9.

SINCE THE publication of Jeremy CARRETTE and Richard KING's *Selling Spirituality* (2004), the academic study of spirituality has grown to become an independent subfield within the study of religion, leading to a proliferation of research on the topic. Studies by scholars such as SHIMAZONO Susumu (2004) and Ioannis GAITANIDIS (2020) reveal how the global phenomenon of spirituality manifests in Japan by exploring intersections with New Religions, Christianity, and capitalism. These studies share a common recognition of the significance of studying spirituality as a distinct phenomenon, with its own sets of traits and trajectories. Building on this idea, Horie Norichika's monograph offers a fresh perspective on the topic by focusing on popular media.

The title of the book also serves as the keyword for the monograph. Horie uses the term “pop spirituality” to analyze public figures and popular ideas that have been featured in the media as a way to explore how the phenomenon is understood and received by the mass public. Particular focus is given to Ehara Hiroyuki 江原啓之 (b. 1964), a key figure in the popularization of spirituality in Japan. Horie's analysis reveals how Ehara positioned himself and his ideas of spirituality as something outside of religion yet borrowing elements from it. By examining Ehara's books and his conversations with his guests when he appeared on television, Horie presents Ehara's popularity as a case study to demonstrate a particular form of “pop” spirituality. Unlike HORIE's previous work (2011), which focused on individual experiences, this book provides a comprehensive overview of spirituality as featured in the media and popular discourse.

The first chapter is dedicated to the etymology of “spirituality.” By tracing the origin of the word “spirit” to the “Holy Spirit” in Christianity, examining how the term is employed in psychology, and observing the developments of how the term is discussed in Japanese scholarship, Horie reveals how the term *supirichuariti*

スピリチュアリテイ absorbs different influences from Christianity, psychology, the New Age movement, and traditional ideas on spirit (*rei* 霊).

In chapter 2, Horie discusses the public reception of “religion” after the sarin gas attack perpetrated by Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教 in 1995 and how this played a role in the development of spirituality as a movement in Japan. After the Aum incident, the public’s view of religion and religious organizations became increasingly negative. The mass media continuously attacked religious organizations such as new religions as they were considered dangerous cults. Aware of this social tension, spiritual practitioners realized the need to distance and differentiate themselves from these negative views on religion. This idea directly ties into chapter 3 where Horie introduces one of the main subjects of the book, Ehara Hiroyuki. Horie discusses how Ehara popularized the term *supirichuaru* スピリチュアル by referring to himself as a *supirichuaru kaunserā* スピリチュアルカウンセラー instead of a *reinōsha* 霊能者, a common term for psychic. By creating this persona of a life counselor, Horie argues that Ehara is distancing himself from not only traditional religious organizations, but religious cults like Aum. The irony is that Ehara himself shares a strong connection to religion since he borrows elements from other religions such as Christianity upon developing his ideas on spirituality. Horie’s analysis of Ehara continues in chapter 4, where he discusses Ehara’s appearances in various media, including magazine articles, books, and television shows. By going through specific sections of three television shows as case studies, Horie observes how Ehara skillfully utilizes different media for different purposes to construct his image in the media. Printed media such as magazines and books are employed to convey his ideas on spiritualism and the “spiritual truth” (*reitekishinri* 霊の真理) while audiovisual media are used to demonstrate concepts and his powers.

In chapter 5, Horie discusses various opposition movements against the popularity of so-called occult shows, eventually leading to Ehara’s retreat from the television industry. One of the first critiques came from The National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales who were concerned that the spiritual elements in these shows might lead to harmful practices referred to as “spiritual business practice” (*reikanshōhō* 霊感商法). The lawyers sent out a letter demanding that the content of these shows be reconsidered. Other issues regarding the content of Ehara’s television shows subsequently surfaced, leading to public distrust of these occult shows. This eventually resulted in the decline of television shows featuring supernatural activities, dragging Ehara’s popularity down with it.

In chapter 6, the focus shifts to contemporary views on reincarnation and how perspectives on life and death have been influenced by the shift from “religion” to “spirituality.” Horie examines views on reincarnation in Buddhism and folklore and compares them to contemporary views in Japan featured in one of Ehara’s television shows. A significant part of the chapter is also devoted to discussing the influences of Brian Weiss’s “past life regression” that involves hypnosis to recover past life memories as part of a spiritual experience.

Chapters 7 and 8 follow the phenomenon of power spots (*pawā supotto* パワー スポット). Horie observes that there are two types of clashing discourse that exist surrounding power spots: New Age-like spirituality, which is more concerned with personal spiritual growth, and Shinto-like spirituality which is focused on restoring “ancient” tradition. Before the first decade of the twenty-first century, the phenomenon of power spots in Japan was heavily influenced by the New Age movement with the idea that various sacred sites from around the world are part of a larger system connecting the earth with the universe. After this time, however, power spots became closely connected to Shinto shrines with benefits (*goriyaku* ご利益) at the center of the phenomenon. Ehara Hiroyuki makes his comeback in the chapter as Horie discusses the influences of Ehara’s book, *Supirichuaru sankuchuari* スピリチュアルサンクチュアリ (Spiritual Sanctuary), on the authenticity of power spots. Through his book, Ehara suggests that the authentic way to visit a shrine is to be grateful to the gods, implying that the benefit-focused activities so far are misguided. Shinto’s strong connection and opinions from figures such as Ehara further ignited responses from nationalistic organizations such as the National Association of Shrines (Jinja Honchō 神社本庁). Horie also explores blogs by people with personal experiences going to power spots. By identifying specific words on these blog entries, Horie argues that while on the surface, visits to power spots are motivated by this-worldly benefits (*genze riyaku* 現世利益), what people feel at the sites are feelings of tranquility, peace, and power.

In the final chapter, Horie takes a sharp turn by focusing on popular culture such as anime. In an attempt to understand the rising popularity of magic (*majutsu* 魔術), Horie utilizes Google and social media such as Twitter and Mixi to examine how users engage with words such as *majutsu* and *supirichuaru*. One of the focal points of the chapter is how awareness and the popularity of magic-related themes reveal that religious knowledge has become widely available. The publication of specific encyclopedias (for example, Sakamoto Masayuki 坂本雅之, *Gēmu shinario no tame no miritarī jiten: Shite okitai guntai, heiki, oyakusoku* 110 ゲームシナリオのためのミリタリー事典—知っておきたい軍隊・兵器・お約束 110 (Tokyo: SB Creative, 2019), and large social events such as Comike allow fans and creators to contribute to the creation of a database that continues to be updated. This chapter raises some interesting questions about the production and dissemination of religious vocabularies and the role of popular culture in the process.

Horie’s work provides a comprehensive examination of over twenty years of the historical development of the spirituality movement in Japan. While previous scholarship such as that by Shimazono has traced the trajectories of the phenomenon, Horie’s main contribution to the topic is his meticulous analysis of Ehara. Ehara is often mentioned in works discussing spirituality, but Horie is the first to genuinely examine this pivotal figure. Horie’s analysis of how Ehara employed different forms of media to construct his image reveals the critical relationship between media and spirituality. Furthermore, television shows, blog entries, and social media posts are

not typical primary sources in religious studies, but Horie has successfully employed these sources to explore the various manifestations of spirituality in popular media. Horie's careful attention to the subject matter is an important contribution for those interested in the representations of spirituality in the media.

Considering the book's encompassing approach to spirituality, it could have benefited from a discussion on the economic aspects of the phenomenon. Much scholarship has discussed the importance of economics in religions. Ioannis Gaitanidis, for example, has demonstrated how "spiritual therapists" employ vocabularies similar to the ones used by Ehara to participate in a "spiritual market" filled with similar competitors. One of these practitioners even considers Ehara a positive role model who guides people without seeking materialistic wealth as some of his predecessors did (GAITANIDIS 2012). This reveals that Ehara was aware of the negative labels attached to some of these spiritual practitioners, especially concerning the commercial aspect of their practice. Horie briefly mentions the issue with The National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales. Further contextualization of these "spiritual sales" and how Ehara views this issue would add an additional layer to understanding spirituality in Japan. Since commercialization was a significant factor in the so-called "spiritual boom," some discussion on this would have enriched the book and provided readers with a better understanding of Ehara's relationship with the media. This minor suggestion aside, Horie's scrupulous portrait of Ehara Hiroyuki reveals new avenues for future research in spirituality and will prove to be a useful resource for scholars of religion and Japan alike.

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