

REVIEW



Miki Hizuru 三木 英 and Sakurai Yoshihide 櫻井義秀, eds., *Nihon ni ikiru imin tachi no shūkyō seikatsu: Nyū kamā no motarasu shūkyō tagenka* 『日本に生きる移民たちの宗教生活—ニューカマーのもたらす宗教多元化』

[Religious lives of immigrants to Japan: The multidimensional development of religion brought by newcomers]

Kyoto: Minerva Shobō, 2012. 320 pages. ¥5250. ISBN 978-4-623-06318-5.



Shūkyō shakaigaku no kai 宗教社会学の会編 [Society of the Sociology of Religion], ed., *Seichi saihō, Ikoma no kamigami: Kawariyuku daitoshi kinkō no minzoku shūkyō* 『聖地再訪・生駒の神々—変わりゆく大都市近郊の民俗宗教』

[Revisiting the sacred place, Gods in the Ikoma Mountains: Changing folk religions in the suburb of a big city]

Osaka: Sōgensha, 2012. 280 pages. ¥1995. ISBN 978-4-422-23029-0.

THESE TWO BOOKS shed light on the multidimensional development and diversification of religions in modern Japan. Both are based on meticulous fieldwork on subjects that are somewhat ignored. As ethnographical research they not only provide a wealth of important information, but also an opportunity to reconsider religions and modernization from a different perspective than one based on Christianity, the institutional religion in Western society.

Miki and Sakurai's *Nihon ni ikiru* vividly describes the variety of trends in the religions of recent immigrants to Japan. The key concept used here is “ethnic religion.” Ethnic religion is the foundation of the cultural boundaries that minority groups build, and is therefore a useful concept when analyzing the lives of immigrants who inevitably become a minority. This book sheds light on the religious lives of immigrants to Japan between cultural assimilation and segregation.

In the first chapter, Hitomi Yasuhiro 人見泰弘 describes the Christian faith of Burmese refugees in Japan, focusing on the religions of refugees who migrated for political and religious reasons. As is commonly observed in other cases, religious life

is connected with ethnic identity. Burma is a multiethnic and multireligious country, but the Karen people, many of whom are Christians, are a minority. Among the roughly ten thousand Burmese immigrants in Japan, Karen Christians are the minority among minorities. The succession of the Christian faith to the next generation is the key to the fate of this ethnic group. As a world religion, Christianity crosses the boundaries of ethnicity, enabling believers to coexist with believers of all religions. This book reveals the dual nature that religion brings to ethnic identity.

The second chapter, coauthored by Shirahase Tastsuya 白波瀬達也 and Takahashi Norihito 高橋典史, and the third chapter by Hoshino Sō 星野 壮, describe the Christian faith of Brazilian immigrants to Japan. These two chapters focus on the Catholic Church and Protestant Church respectively, revealing institutional characteristics of each denomination in light of the reality of immigrants' religious lives. In the Catholic Church, Japanese and foreign believers worship together in the same church but maintain a segregation between each other. On the other hand, the church serves as a support base, providing foreign residents with programs such as food and schooling assistance as a part of their religious activities. In Protestant churches, Brazilians have established typical ethnic churches of their own that provide them with the "space for Brazilians" that the Catholic Church in Japan could never provide. This is because while the Catholic faith is dominant in Brazil, many of the Protestant believers among Brazilian immigrants converted from Catholicism after they came to Japan. Reading these two chapters in a comparative way, we understand that people may choose religion not on the basis of a doctrine or belief, but from the perspective of the surrounding system or organization in the course of their geographical and cultural transfer as immigrants.

In the fourth chapter, Miki Hizuru and Numajiri Masayuki 沼尻正之 describe an interesting case whereby Peruvians living in Japan replicate a festival from their home country known as the "Señor de los Milagros" that is now celebrated in many places in Japan. This eye-catching festival, during which a portable shrine is carried in a parade, is the best opportunity for Peruvians to express their ethnic identity. For this reason, they celebrate the festival regionally. In this chapter, the authors describe this festival in light of the communication between Japanese and immigrants, and also point out that the form the festival takes may be modified depending upon this communication.

In the fifth chapter, Sakurai Yoshihide reviews studies on the religions of immigrants in terms of the theoretical study and accumulation of previous work, presenting an analytical viewpoint of foreign religions in addition to recent trends such as the interest in spirituality and therapy culture. Particularly striking in the course of the unique religious history of Japan is that these foreign religions have come after an era of emerging new religions that, in turn, followed Japanese traditional religions.

In the sixth chapter, Teerapol Kulprangthong describes the temples used by Thai immigrants in Japan. What especially interests us is the relationship between those

with legal residency and those without. Those without tend to distance themselves from those who have legal residency—as well as Japanese people—because they are afraid of being reported to the immigration authorities when a problem arises. The chapter shows that Thai temples serve as a focal point that sustains “weak ties” that these people have under such circumstances. In other words, a Thai temple has the potential to become a useful social resource that connects people who have differing interests but share a common religious culture.

The Korean churches described in the seventh chapter by Lee Hyunkyung 李賢京 also serve as ethnic churches. As with other ethnic groups, there are many cases where some newcomers become more serious about their faith than in their home country, or where those who used to be non-Christians get baptized in Japan. Korean churches function as a unit of Korean culture and serve as places where newcomers can prevent their children from becoming over-Japanized, meet their fellow citizens, and obtain useful information.

In the eighth chapter, coauthors Numajiri and Miki describe Muslims in Japan, who are “invisibly existent” even at present, and how to coexist with them in Japanese society has become a major issue. This chapter, which is based on research conducted at several mosques, highlights the importance of connecting Muslims and the local society that has accepted them. Here, lacking a politically appointed coordinator who mediates between guests and hosts means that the religious institution is very likely to become an isolated ethnic community in the local area.

This book therefore not only illustrates various aspects of the localization of world religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam, but also sheds light on the situation of religions in Japanese society as the recipients of such world religions, trying to develop a theory on modern religions. The authors have chosen their topics according to a combination of immigrants and religions in Japan, whereas Japanese society itself is not well aware of its situation as a society with an increasing number of immigrants because of the situation of “invisible settlement.” The authors closely examine the religious lives of immigrants, which are not necessarily open to outsiders. Considering this, this contribution is extremely important, and bodes well for international comparative studies of immigrant religions. Future proposals for local and national policies will also be an important issue as an extension of the study in this book.

While *Nihon ni ikiru* is a study that enables us to compare religions synchronically in the contemporary era, *Seichi saihō, Ikoma no kamigami* is a diachronic comparative study. The basis of the book is a second visit to the Ikoma Mountains, the same place under research in the 1980s, enabling the authors to present a historical comparison of religion by taking into consideration changes in the twenty-year period between the first and second visit. As the Introduction of the book mentions, Japanese society during this period experienced further modernization, urbanization, and rationalization nationwide in the course of the asset price bubble. Until the 1980s the Ikoma Mountains were rich in folk religions that are an amalgam of

local religious customs, beliefs outside of institutional doctrines and practices, or individual spiritualities, but things have changed greatly since the economic collapse at the beginning of the 1990s. Scholars studying religion and society in the Kansai region revisited the Ikoma area and described the transformation of local gods in detail.

One of the characteristics of the Ikoma Mountains as a sacred place for folk religions is its closeness to an urban area, Osaka. Not being secluded from the secular world, Ikoma is the holy ground bordering the sacred and the secular, and to which people living in the city can have access on a daily basis. Due to this position, the Ikoma Mountains have been exposed to a wave of modernization, including land development for housing and an expansion of the transportation network.

The first chapter, “Revisiting Gods in Ikoma,” exhaustively introduces the current status of various religious institutions there. There are numerous independent religious institutions, prayer houses, and Korean temples in the area, but overall they are on the decline, with quite a few institutions having disappeared or closed. Such changes are caused by secularization in the simplest meaning, but a more direct cause is a failure to adapt to generational changes. Religions in the Ikoma Mountains are characterized by their diverseness and multiplicity, and the religious mosaic brought by them has been its attraction as a sacred place. However, the result is that there is a lack of structure and a fluidity that means it is difficult to keep steady membership and manage the institutions. In this chapter, the case of a religious group run by a charismatic founder that is now facing difficulties is analyzed.

The second chapter, “Various Aspects of Gods: A Quarter Century Later,” describes the profiles of major religious institutions in the Ikoma area, including Ishikiri Shrine 石切神社, Hōzanji 宝山寺, Chōgosonshiji 朝護孫子寺, and other fasting houses and Korean temples. Since this area is a holy ground for popular religions, “benefits” are a key factor in attracting more worshippers. This chapter introduces the strategies of shrines and temples used when presenting themselves anew, trying to meet the demands in the needs and wishes of worshippers.

The third chapter, “New Gods in Ikoma,” introduces religious institutions that have actively been building new networks. Although the Korean temples were for sometime in decline, some “temples in the mountain” and “temples in the town” have developed a network through organizational connections centering on a Buddhist society, and through the affiliated activities of Buddhists to the further reaches of society. In addition, the number of shops located on the “fortune-telling street” alongside the approach of Ishikiri Shrine is obviously increasing, in line with the so-called trend in spirituality, and those shops are continuing to play a role in counseling young people who are seeking meaning in their lives in the midst of change. Among them are groups that want to build a new network using the Internet or digital devices.

Facilitated by the emergence of new urban residents, large-scale cemeteries have been developed that have given the Ikoma Mountains an image of being able

to comfort the spirits of the deceased. Most urban residents purchase a tomb for themselves before their own death, afraid that their offspring may not look after it, showing the recent trend of the “individualism of death.”

The Ikoma Mountains are a place for us to study how religions can transform themselves while sensitively responding to the changes of an era. In a study conducted by Western researchers, religious changes through the process of secularization are discussed primarily with Christianity in mind. In contrast, *Seichi saihō, Ikoma no kamigami* provides many unique discussions on the secularization of religions in Japan and its impact on the Ikoma Mountains where numerous types of religious institutions, from fortune-telling to traditional temples and shrines, can be found. The writing is lyrical and sensitive, something that only those able to closely observe the subject can provide, allowing us to feel the atmosphere of the Ikoma Mountains directly and deeply. I believe that this book will not only encourage scholars to relativize discussions on Western religions and their modernization, but also invite general readers to the enriched religious world of the Ikoma Mountains.

From the 1960s onward, the study of Japanese contemporary religions has tried to relativize Western studies and produce a self-made framework for research. In this process, Japanese New Religious Movements (NRMS) became the subject of research. While one of the main themes of study was the diversification of religions in modern society, many NRMS were rooted in traditional religiosity. In respect to the formation of an organization or belief system, Japanese NRMS were a novelty, but they fundamentally carried an indigenous religious worldview that Shinto and Japanese Buddhism had built and mediated. In that sense, the study of Japanese NRMS was none other than that of the contemporary reconstruction and recontextualization of folk spiritualities. In contrast, these two books shed light on the developments of religiosities rooted in a totally different religious world. The impact of these books is equal to that of the “discovery of NRMS,” and there is no doubt that they will be a new starting point in Japanese contemporary religious studies.

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