From *Minkan-shinkō* to *Minzoku-shūkyō*

Reflections on the Study of Folk Buddhism

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RECENTLY JAPANESE SCHOLARS have stopped using the term *minkan shinkō* 民間信仰 (folk beliefs) in favor of the term *minzoku shūkyō* 民俗宗教 (folk/popular religion).[1] This modification signifies not merely a change in terminology, but also a major shift in the boundaries of what anthropologists and scholars of religion perceive as religious phenomena, i.e., in what is, or could be, the object of the study of folklore or folk religion. In this essay I wish to discuss the reasons for this change and its significance for the study of religion in Japan. What is the realm of religion (*shūkyō sekai*) that we are attempting to comprehend through our study of "folk/popular religion" (*minzoku shūkyō*)? I hope to consider this question from the broader perspective provided by *minzokugaku*, the field of folklore or folk studies.

The Significance of Minkan Shinkō

There was a time when the study of *minkan shinkō* was perceived as the most fertile of the many fields within Japanese folk studies.

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[1] Shimazono Susumu is one scholar who, from an early date, found this shift in terminology significant. In fact he has gone a step further and more recently prefers to use the term *shūgō shūkyō* 習合宗教 (syncretic religion). According to Shimazono, recently the term *minzoku shūkyō* has come to mean almost the same thing as *dochaku shūkyō* 土着宗教 (indigenous religion) or *minkan shinkō*, and it therefore only confuses the matter to try to give this term a special meaning (see SHIMAZONO 1987).

Although most scholars continue to think along these lines even today, I deliberately use the phrase "there was a time" to highlight the point that at one time the study of *minkan shinkō* meant more than just having a large number of people dig up a great variety of facts and offer a potpourri of theories and viewpoints.

In other words, the understanding of folk beliefs and practices was the final goal of the numerous systematic theories or explanations produced in the various fields within Japanese folklore (*minzoku-gaku*). This particular characteristic can be seen, for example, in the study of *mukashibanashi* 昔話 (fairy tales) or in the analysis of Japanese nomenclature, where there was an attempt to identify a religious ideal—a special or particular kind of belief—lurking in the background and providing a religious foundation for individual motifs or names. It was only when such an explanation was provided that the theories were accepted, even though the theories themselves were not clearly stated or proven.[2] There is not much sense in discussing at length the legitimacy of such a methodology as a general approach, since such a perspective does, in fact, lead to insight into some issues. Nor do I have any intention to go back and examine each and every argument and conclusion made over the years on the basis of the study of *minkan shinkō*. Let it suffice to say that, for better or worse, the assumption implicit in these theories and discussions of folk beliefs was that the various fields of folk studies were all assorted expressions of a vague but basic *minkan shinkō*. It can also be said that the (folk) society that understood this logical paradigm, at least insofar as they understood its logic, was a society that was "sacralized" through these folk beliefs, and a society in which all aspects of life were permeated and influenced by these folk beliefs.

What, then, is the significance of the shift to the study of *minzoku-shūkyō*? This concept has different nuances to different people, but the following contrast is generally accepted. *Minkan-shinkō* studies

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[2] Allow me to offer just one specific example. During the discussion period of the panel on "The Transmission and Dissemination of *mukashibanashi*" at the "Conference in Honor of the 100th Anniversary of Yanagita Kunio's Birth" in July 1975, the following pronouncement was made from the floor: "What sort of things comprised the background for things such as *minwa* and *mukashibanashi*? ....I mean, what were the social conditions that must be known in order to speak about *minwa* and *mukashibanashi*.... Wasn't there such a thing? Is it enough to just repeat the *mukashibanashi* and leave it at that?" Nomura Jun'ichi, one of the panelists, responded vigorously to the effect that there is something in the depths of *mukashibanashi*—specifically the faith/beliefs (*shinkō*) of the ancient Japanese—that should be clarified as an integral part of all *mukashibanashi*. Sakurai Tokutarō commented next, adding that this tendency was very strong in the work of Yanagita Kunio. See NIHON MINZOKUGAKKAI 1978.

always perceive *minkan shinkō*—the commonly shared, customary beliefs and notions rooted within a specific place and cultural setting—in opposition to "established religion," a religious tradition with a founder, and which is ideologically and doctrinally constructed. *Minzoku-shūkyō* studies, on the other hand, try to perceive these phenomena in terms of their mutual influence. However, *minzoku shūkyō*/folk-popular religion no longer has the tenacity to sink its roots into modern culture and society. In a sense folk religion is like grass with weak roots. In contrast to *minkan-shinkō* studies, however, *minzoku-shūkyō* studies offer the potential to examine religious phenomena as a part of folk society, and as one aspect of religion in general. They provide the means to examine the breakdown of folk beliefs—the "secularization" of folk society.[3]

*Escape from the Local Community—The Disappearance of the Village (*mura*)*

Certainly the so-called secularization of folk society that coincided with the emergence of *minzoku-shūkyō* studies could be interpreted as a mere rhetorical flourish instead of a real theoretical problem, and one that came about as a result of a shift in the object of interest by those investigating religion within the field of folk studies. However, there is another way of looking at this situation.

Japan in the modern age is experiencing a total breakdown in a certain category of concepts—let us call them "folk beliefs"—that used to operate at the deepest levels of culture to form social structures and shape all the activities of the people. The formerly overwhelming influence of these "folk beliefs" is gradually waning. In the midst of these extensive changes in the very marrow of society, questions have been raised as to the validity of the category "folk beliefs" (*minkan shinkō*) for folk studies as an experiential science. Thus the emergence of the more appropriate category of "folk/popular religion"

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[3] The term "secularization" has been used so broadly that it may have lost its usefulness as an analytical tool. Originally the term was used to interpret the change in the relationship between society and organized religion = the Christian Church, and some may object that it is not appropriate to apply this term in analyzing folk beliefs. Jan Swyngedouw (1978), however, has used the concept of secularization to analyze the breakdown of traditional symbol systems and the emergence of various forms of new religious consciousness. This approach can be applied to folk religion. This, however, is only possible when one consciously takes a comparative approach. It is not necessarily the case that those involved in folk studies are aware of the possibility of understanding the changes facing folk beliefs through the concept of secularization. The approach of those in folk studies even today is, alas, still influenced by the former *minkan shinkō* approach.

(*minzoku shūkyō*).[4] In any case this modification in terminology is not merely a shifting around of words with no reflection on the content of their referents. Though apparently proceeding at a snail's pace, folk studies is oscillating in tune with the times.

There are two key concepts at work here: the "folk foundation" (*minzokuteki kiban* 民俗的基盤) and local societies or communities (*chii-ki shakai* 地域社会 or *kyōdōtai* 共同体).

Sakurai Tokutarō, one of the current proponents of *minzoku-shūkyō* studies, illustrates the position of *minkan-shinkō* studies in his discussion of the practice of Ise pilgrimage in one of his early works, and describes the folk characteristics of this practice as follows:

> It appears that the direct catalyst for Ise pilgrimage to become so prevalent among the common people was the fad of *okage-mairi* お蔭参り (the occasional outbreak of large-scale group pilgrimages to Ise Shrine) which first appeared in the early seventeenth century. Further inquiry into the origins of these activities, however, shows that they are based on older folk practices, such as religious activities while climbing in the mountains, and visits to shrines and temples. Though the custom of *nuke-mairi* 抜参り (wherein people "escaped" from their normal responsibilities and went on pilgrimages to Ise without the permission of their parents, masters, and so forth), is often looked on as an aberrant or bizarre phenomenon, it is generally considered the original form of *okage-mairi*. This, however, is not the case. *Nuke-mairi* was actually based on customs passed down from ages past, and arose from secret coming-of-age ceremonies among the Japanese people. These customs were absorbed into the practices of shrine and temple pilgrimage, and combined especially with the fad of Ise pilgrimage that happened to gain popularity at that time. The reason that Ise-related spirituality (*Ise shinkō*) was able to

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[4] Ikado Fujio says that secularization is the process of "social functional differentiation" that follows the ideologization of a society's fundamental religious cosmology. Thus in a secularized society, there is a certain relativized sense of values existing alongside the more pervasive values held in common by the majority of people. In such a society, a situation in which religion permeates all aspects and activities of daily life is no longer possible (see IKADO 1978, pp. 74–75). I will discuss this point in more detail later, but leaving aside the point as to whether or not folk beliefs have in fact become "ideologized," it is certain that along with the breakdown of local communities, a religious worldview (such as a dominant system of folk beliefs and practices) that is all-inclusive and universal has lost all relevancy in modern Japanese society. Thus any kind of folk or popular religion, as long as it is bound to the structure of a particular ideal (*rinen* 理念), is inevitably limited to only a part of the daily life of the people, even if it achieves a high degree of functionality.

> expand and develop on a nationwide scale is because it
> absorbed and utilized the basic folk beliefs and practices that
> had been handed down for generations among the Japanese
> people. (SAKURAI 1958, p. 246)

This quote is from the concluding section of an essay on *Nuke-mairi no genryū* 抜参りの源流 (reprinted in SAKURAI 1958, pp. 231–48). Sakurai hypothesizes a theoretical series of influences underlying the emergence of the Ise Shrine pilgrimage practices: ancient coming-of-age ceremonies© religious practices in the mountains and shrine and temple visits© *nuke-mairi*© *okage-mairi*© the Ise pilgrimage practices among the common people. In addition to *okage-mairi* and *nuke-mairi*, Sakurai also mentions *daisan* 代参 (substitute pilgrimage)—the practice of having someone make the visit or pilgrimage in one's place—which he sees as the immediate progenitor of the popularized Ise pilgrimage. He stresses, moreover, that this "chain" was not the only route of popularization. One must not forget the role of the local Shinto priests involved with Yoshida Shinto, nor the active propagation carried on by the Ise Shrine priests and the evangelistic activity of the *oshi* 御師 priests. Thus at one end of the chain we find a religious organization and its activities centering on a sacred site, both shaped and guided by a certain religious ideology (albeit one that is not as clear-cut as those of the "established" or "institutionalized" religions that have always been considered to be at the opposite pole from *minkan shinkō*. At the other end of the chain we find the popular custom of the coming-of-age ceremony, the traditional way of passing on the life of the community to the next generation.

Sakurai hypothesizes another chain of development in the initiation of young people (*wakamono-iri* 若者入り), one concerned in particular with religious activity:

1　The stage when the sphere of human activity is not very wide, and the object of religious focus at the time of the young people's initiation is limited to local deities such as the *yama-no-kami* (mountain kami), *ta-no-kami* (field kami), or *ubusuna-gami* (tutelary kami).

2　The stage when the people are faced with a religious focus from outside the local society, such as when a missionary or teacher of a specific faith appears; at this stage the sacred mountains around the country become the focus of pilgrimage by young people.

3　The stage during which religious activity expands—for exam-

ple, the time that young people take for the pilgrimage
becomes longer than ten days, the pilgrimage develops multi-
ple destinations (such as various clusters of three peaks, seven
mountains, and so forth), or the pilgrimage visits a range of
sacred spots (the Ise pilgrimage is of this type).

It is clear that Sakurai's argument is based on connecting the first
and second stages of this chain. In more general terms, regardless of
how universal a religion's teachings may be, and regardless of how
much larger in scale it may be than that of the religion of the local
society, this is not enough for the religion to take root as an accepted
part of the customs of a local society or community. The critical factor
is whether or not there is something within the customs and folk
beliefs of the local society that allows the "outside" religion to be
accepted. In other words, one of the basic assumptions of folk studies
for understanding culture has been the idea that when an established
religion is sinking its roots into a local society and becoming part of
its religious customs, there must be an underlying structure deep
within the local society that will be reflected in the eventual results of
this synthesis.

Another important aspect of this way of thinking is that the "folk"
(*minkan*) of "folklore" (*minkan denshō* 民間伝承), though always
ambiguous, is never confused with or substituted for "the common
people" (*shomin* 庶民) or "the masses" (*minshū* 民衆), but is a concept
that cannot be separated from the local society or community that
has been considered the primary social group in Japan. In other
words, the assumption is that a certain "folk foundation" (*minzokuteki
kiban*) exists within local societies and communities.

Sakurai expresses the same kind of idea in a more direct way in
another article, where he writes:

> This area [on Awaji-shima] has been completely dominated
> by the Shingon school of Buddhism. However, a close exami-
> nation of even the most important religious event (*hongyōji*
> 本行事) of this area[5]—one that could be called a "monopoly"
> of the Shingon temple(s)—shows that it is not originally a
> Buddhist ceremony. Rather, it was a native ceremony that
> developed within the local society, then merged with
> Buddhism and was recast as a temple-centered ritual. (SAKURAI
> 1966, p. 208)

[5] Translator's note: the Mawari Benten festival of Awaji-shima.

The above forms an outline of the basic paradigm of *minkan-shinkō* studies, that folk beliefs and practices can exist as cultural factors only on the basis of a local society that possesses some sort of centripetal structure. What meaning, then, does this paradigm have for the current situation in Japan?

One answer to this question is the importance, even necessity, of the shift to *minzoku shūkyō* in order to study Japanese religion, as I stated in the opening paragraphs of this article. There are two major reasons for this. The first is the theoretical limits that have been reached by the approach that absolutizes *minkan shinkō* and unabashedly identifies Japanese *minkan shinkō* as "unique." The second cause is the deterioration and even collapse of exterior factors, i.e., the local societies themselves.

Actually the theory of the uniqueness of Japanese religious beliefs and practices has been bankrupt for quite some time.[6] The problem is that many people are still attached to the legacy of Yanagita Kunio. In this sense the following quote from Sakurai Tokutarō, in which he discards the concept of "unique religiosity" (*koyū shinkō* 固有信仰), is quite momentous:

> Yanagita Kunio strove all his life in pursuit of the "unique religiosity" of the Japanese people. This was the final goal of Yanagita's folk studies/ethnology. However, this has turned out to be an abstract concept that can never really be grasped—something with no actual substance, like a utopia.... Like the concept of "truth," it will forever elude all attempts to concretize it. Even if we reach some sort of theoretical conclusion with regard to the matter, it will always remain an illusion and not a fact. (SAKURAI 1978, p. 3)[7]

It should be added that in the opening section of the article just quoted,

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[6] The problems with the belief that the purpose of folk studies/ethnology is to clarify the unique *ethnos* of each ethnic group has been thoroughly discussed by, for example, FUKUDA Ajio (1984).

[7] This statement has appeared in many places (see SAKURAI 1978, reprinted in SAKURAI 1982), and should have created a major response. However, it seems that Japanese ethnologists have for the most part passed it over. Even Sakurai himself doesn't seem to have realized the full implications of his statement, adding only that it is important to note the tension that occurs when people with traditional folk beliefs come in contact with a representative and practicer of a new religion. He does not take the further step of investigating what kind of religion remains after the framework of "uniqueness" is stripped away.

In any case it is symbolic of the changes in folk studies that Sakurai started his quarter-century of research on religion with a book entitled *Nihon minkan-shinkō-ron* (1958) and, almost twenty-five years later, published a book called *Nihon minzoku-shūkyō-ron* (1982).

Sakurai presents a scheme in which he places established, institutional religions at one end, and folk beliefs and "unique religiosity" at the other. Both ends expand toward each other until they meet and merge in the middle at the level of local society and actual daily life (see illustration).[8] From the perspective of established religion, this

field of contact and fusion

established religion · · · · folk religion
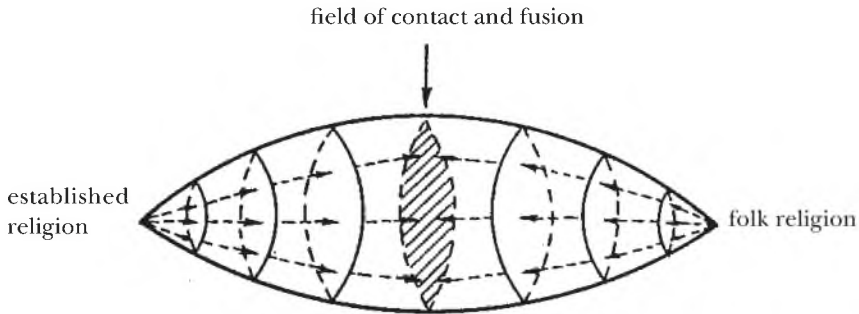
field of contact and fusion is perceived as the area where indigenization occurs; and it is to this area that many elements of folk religion and "unique" Japanese religiosity send out their branches. It is also this area in which folk beliefs and practices actually function and display the most activity. Sakurai says that it is this area of merging and fusing between the two types of religion that should be the focus of *minkan-shinkō* studies.

This assessment by Sakurai Tokutarō is more realistic and stimulating than former theories of *minkan shinkō*. However, as Sakurai himself has pointed out in the statement quoted above, the scope of *minkan shinkō* is limited and contains an inherent contradiction, and thus Sakurai could not avoid taking a critical stance towards the concept. It seems that his about-face on this issue was based on his own reflections and reconsiderations. In any case, once the point has been clearly stated, it should be only a short step to advocating the idea of *minzoku shūkyō* as a substitute for *minkan shinkō*.

However, it is not enough to reach a theoretical understanding of this idea. There is a need to connect the idea to a broader framework, and to understand this about-face by Sakurai and other major scholars in terms of the structural changes that are occurring in modern Japanese society.

[8] Illustration from Sakurai 1977, reprinted in *Nihon minzoku-shūkyō-ron* (1982).

For this purpose it might be helpful to first examine the statistics showing the changes in where people are dying and being born in modern Japan (see tables 1 and 2).[9] As the data in the tables show, births and deaths in Japan are increasingly occurring not in the home but in institutions—in most cases a hospital. The shift revealed by these statistics is precipitous and large-scale. The main factor behind this landslide-like shift is none other than the modern experience of rapid economic growth. The effect of this massive change is

Table 1. Trends in Birth Rates and Place of Birth

Year	# of Births	Births at Institutions		Births at Home	
		#	%	#	%
1947	2,678,792	64,180	2.4	2,614,612	97.6
1950	2,337,507	106,826	4.6	2,230,681	95.4
1955	1,730,692	305,127	17.6	1,425,565	82.4
1960	1,606,041	804,557	50.1	801,484	49.9
1965	1,823,697	1,531,812	84.0	291,885	16.0
1970	1,934,237	1,858,738	96.1	75,501	3.9
1975	1,901,440	1,879,404	98.8	22,036	1.2
1980	1,576,889	1,569,643	99.5	7,246	0.5

Table 2. Trends in Death Rates and Place of Death

Year	# of Deaths	Deaths at Institutions		Deaths at Home	
		#	%	#	%
1947	1,138,238	104,860	9.2	1,033,378	90.8
1950	904,876	100,518	11.1	804,358	88.9
1955	693,523	107,139	15.4	586,384	84.6
1960	706,599	155,038	21.9	551,561	78.1
1965	700,438	200,342	28.6	500,096	71.4
1970	712,962	267,292	37.5	445,670	62.5
1975	702,275	328,101	46.7	374,174	53.3
1980	722,801	411,970	57.0	310,831	43.0
1981	720,262	430,537	59.8	289,725	40.2
1982	711,883	445,746	62.6	266,137	37.4

[9] Data for tables from KODO SEICHO O KANGAERU KAI 1985, p. 3 (table 1) and p. 235 (table 2).

something that not only ethnologists but experts in all the social sciences have experienced first-hand through their field work. Although I regret to say that I am unaware of any research on the concrete effects of this change on the various daily customs of the Japanese people, a number of hypotheses can be proposed. In relation to the topics we have been discussing, for example, we could say that there has been a general withdrawal from participation in old customs connected to the family, or *ie*, Japan's most fundamental social unit. Advances in the health care system, along with the advance of medical science, have caused changes in the home, which used to be the main place where birth and death occurred. Concretely speaking, the structure of the family in Japan has shifted to that of the nuclear family, centered around a married couple and their children, accompanied by a trend toward fewer offspring, an increase in the number of working couples, separation between home and workplace (and the increasing distance between the two), increases in the average life expectancy, and general urbanization. The rapid depopulation of the countryside has left many rural households without any young people. It goes without saying that such changes will have a huge impact on customs and practices that are based on the family.

The problem, moreover, is not limited to a general social level. The most striking aspect of these statistics is that they indicate that the modern family is, in itself, no longer a place where birth and death occur. People no longer expect the family to play a role in these matters, and even if they did, the family no longer has the capacity to do so. Japanese society, which by cultivating a universal middle-class consciousness has succeeded in achieving rapid economic growth, has simultaneously produced a different concept of the family, and even of life and death. This means that the family—which used to be the central place for dealing with birth and death—as well as the various customs and practices that developed on the basis of this former family structure, must be totally reconsidered.

These changes have not occurred only at the level of the family. Since the early 1960s Japan's cities have greatly expanded, like bloated monsters that have grown beyond the capacity of human beings to control. This wave of urbanization has, of course, affected the villages and countryside, with immeasurable repercussions for folk beliefs, customs, and practices. These effects are not limited to the aforementioned depopulation, which is in itself rather passive and limited in its influence on folk life, but extend to a basic uprooting of traditional folk society itself.

The Lure of the Hijiri

As the advantages of advocating *minzoku-shūkyō* studies in place of *minkan-shinkō* studies have become increasingly clearer, a certain scholarly trend has appeared. This approach attempts to try and understand religious phenomena as a product of mutual interaction—not just a friendly affinity but a deeper relationship that includes discordant elements such as mutual transformation, isolation, and rejection—between two forces: on the one hand the deep-rooted collection of religious rituals and practices of daily life, and on the other hand a collection of sacred meanings shaped by a certain worldview or value system (e.g., Buddhism). Since folk studies (*minzokugaku*) emerged from a study of religion within communities, there has been a great interest in religious figures who have controlled or supplied "sacred meanings": figures who are more influential than the religious organizations themselves, and who are often called *hijiri* (聖 or ヒジリ).[10]

The investigation of *hijiri* is, of course, not the only possible route open to *minzoku-shūkyō* studies, and it is not without its drawbacks, but I believe it is a proper choice. The reason is that in order to understand the phenomenon of religion and get an accurate picture of its world—without viewing it in terms of other social or literary disciplines and without relying on the subjective terminology and theory of the representatives of organized religion—it is necessary to view it from where the individual *hijiri* (as representative and propagator of a "universal" religion) and the local believers meet and interact. Whether or not the *minzokugaku* scholars have fulfilled this condition is a matter of debate, but in any case, the perspective of the *hijiri* as an objective medium or conduit has been indispensable for reaching an understanding of religion in Japan.[11]

It is important to point out that the status and role of *hijiri* has been complicated and ambiguous. From the perspective of the established religious organizations, the *hijiri* were official representatives at the front lines of religious propagation, and yet were also often the source of heretical teachings. Thus they were often neither easy to control nor even particularly welcome as far as the organized religions were concerned. Nor are they always on the surface of history, at least as scholars have presented it.

[10] Translator's note: Perhaps *hijiri* is best translated as "wandering holy man"—see READER 1993, pp. 5–6.

[11] For a detailed discussion of the social and religious significance of the *hijiri*, see SHINNO 1986.

For example, it is impossible to correctly understand the new religious movements of the early medieval period, usually called "new Kamakura Buddhism," without taking into account the activity of the *hijiri*. Usually this Kamakura Buddhism movement is explained on the basis of the instability of the late Heian period, as a shift in ways of thinking, resulting in the acceptance of eschatological and Pure Land ideas. Thus, most of the attention is paid to the two major Pure Land schools—Jōdoshū and Jōdo Shinshū—and to the idea of salvation for the masses propagated by the Nichiren school. The "pure" Zen ideas of the period are then taken up from a slightly different perspective, along with the Ritsu School of Nara Buddhism and its attempt to revive the precepts (*kairitsu fukkō* 戒律復興). However, even the two "conceptual" movements—Pure Land and Lotus—must be considered in light of the activities of *nenbutsu hijiri* (peripatetic Pure Land practicers) and *jikyōsha* 持経者 (peripatetic followers and propagators of the *Lotus Sūtra*) in the previous Heian period and continuing into the Kamakura period (see INOUE 1971). The same can be said for the Zen and Ritsu schools—their activities cannot be properly understood without reference to the various kinds of Buddhist practicers in the period before the medieval age. In fact, there were Zen and Ritsu sangha in the large system of medieval temples who—quite separately from the Zen and Ritsu monks (*zen-shū* 禅衆; *ritsu-shū* 律衆) living in temples of their respective sects—operated under the scholar monks and always maintained their status as practice-oriented figures (*gyōja* 行者).[12] The Pure Land *nenbutsu hijiri* and the Ritsu monks played a central role, for example, in the funeral practices of the common people in the Kinki (i.e., Kansai: Osaka/Kyoto/Nara/ Kii) area during the medieval period.[13] Again, the incursion of the Zen school into

[12] At Tōdai-ji, for example, persons who dwelt at the Hokke-dō 法華堂 or Chūmon-dō 中門堂 and studied Zen meditation or the precepts were called the *zen-shū* 禅衆, *zen-to* 禅徒, *ritsu-shū* 律衆, *ritsugaku-shū* 律学衆, *ka-shū* 夏衆, *dō-shū* 堂衆, and so forth. They were responsible for offering flowers to the Buddha and other tasks in the temple, and were also involved in pilgrimages to the mountains for ascetic practice. Groups of monks of the same character in the medieval period included the *gyōja* of Mt. Kōya (in contrast to the scholar-monks, *gakuro* 学侶), the *tō-shū* 堂衆 of Mt. Hiei (in contrast to the *gakushō* 学生), and the *tō-shū* of the Higashi and Nishi Kondō of Kōfuku-ji. There is still much we do not know about the exact role and function these people played in the temples. We do know, however, that they did not necessarily always stay in one particular temple, but often moved back and forth between "Zen" and "Ritsu" institutions. They functioned as a certain social "stratum." For details see HIRAOKA 1981 and NAGAMURA 1981.

[13] For details see TANAKA 1986. The relationship between Ritsu monks and funeral practices is a relatively new topic that has not received much attention until recent years. See also HOSOKAWA 1980 and 1981 on the Ritsu monks of Tōshōdai-ji and their involvement

funeral practices in the fifteenth century, activities far removed from their metaphysical ideals, may have been an extension of their *hijiri*-type role activities from earlier times. In short, the so-called New Kamakura Buddhism—including the Ritsu school—could accurately be described as *hijiri*- and *gyōja*-type Buddhism in a new independent form.[14]

Thus *hijiri* were not merely peripheral figures at the fringes of the Buddhist religious institution; rather, they stood in a relatively strong and independent position directly before the common believers and in daily contact with them, and were for that reason possessed of a capacity to respond to the inner needs, values, and worldviews of the common believer. This, of course, led to the birth of unique religious outlooks. To call these developments "heretical" is merely the logic and judgment of the established religious institutions.

Also traceable to the activities of the *hijiri* was the foundation of the *danka* system 檀家制度 under the Tokugawa bakufu, whereby all households were registered with a local Buddhist temple. This was, in effect, a systematization of the *hijiri*'s proselytization activities during the sixteenth century, when they established small temples in the farming villages that served as the bases from which the true popularization of Buddhism took place.

Nevertheless, the activities of the *hijiri* were not always forceful enough to allow them a guiding role in the religious currents of the age. Certain external conditions were required for *hijiri* to play a part, conditions leading to a deterioration in the balance of the religious system that had been functioning stably and appropriately within the context of the social order.

The first such condition is a fundamental and rapid change that marks a change in eras. The bloated organizations of established religions are helpless in such times of crisis, of which the Kamakura period, when the "New Kamakura Buddhism" arose, was one.

with funeral practices and fund-raising in and outside the temple. See also GANGŌ-JI BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1984 and 1985 for studies on the graves of the medieval period.

[14] FUNAOKA Makoto (1985) divides the development of Buddhism in Japan from the ancient to medieval periods into three stages: first, the establishment of the scholastically-oriented six Nara schools; second, the establishment of the two Heian schools of the Shingon and Tendai sects in the early ninth century as the official recognition of "mountain Buddhism" (practice-oriented Buddhism); and third, the independence of practice-oriented Buddhism in the thirteenth century along with the establishment of the new Buddhism of the Kamakura period. He points out that the development of the Zen school in Japan also followed this pattern, and is more of a continuation of the practices and traditions of the Heian period than a transmission of a new dharma from China.

Another period that has received much attention is the so-called *baku-matsu* and Meiji restoration period at the end of the nineteenth century, during which groups such as Konkō-kyō, Tenri-kyō, Maruyama-kyō, and Kurozumi-kyō began to form, first as assemblies of people gathering around a local religious figure, and later developing into religious organizations with doctrines and large-scale followings. The roots of these organizations were usually in the villages and rural areas. However, considering the social and economic conditions experienced in the villages at this time, it would not be correct to claim that these New Religions developed as an extension of the traditional values of the rural community.

Another condition that must be considered is one I have already discussed earlier in this article—i.e., the problem of urbanization, or the permeation of urban culture into the rural community. In other words, a community of people who had built up folk beliefs and practices under the aegis of a common worldview, has—due to the pressures of urban culture and the accompanying breakdown of communal values—become merely a fragmentary gathering of individuals. In this situation, a full religious view cannot be created except through the direct relationships that are built up between a *hijiri*-type figure and his/her followers.

In this sense the Ikoma mountain range to the east of Osaka is truly a modern "religious space." This mountainous area—surrounded by the three urban areas of Osaka, Kyoto, and Nara—has been the home ground of numerous religious figures from ancient times. Even today it can be described as a huge religious center that serves the large religious market of the Kinki region. In recent years, a group of researchers in the sociology of religion has attempted a large-scale survey of this area (see SHŪKYŌSHAKAIGAKU NO KAI 1985 and 1987; IIDA 1988). One of the main points that the survey focused on was that, although the area does possess a number of large and famous shrines and temples, the majority of activity is carried out by numerous small-scale religious groups and associations centered around a spiritual leader. The Ikoma mountain range contains the famous Ikoma Shōten 生駒聖天 (Hōzan-ji 宝山寺); the Chōgo-sonshi-ji 朝護孫子寺, a center for faith in Bishamon-ten; Ishikiri-jinja 石切神社, famous as a center for healing; and various small (and some not-so-small) shrines, temples, and chapels that on the surface appear quite traditional—with names including Kannon, Fudō, Myōken, Daikoku, and Inari—and that attempt to lure religious followers by providing spiritual experiences involving various kami and buddhas. There are also

innumerable places scattered in the valleys and mountainsides that offer religious services: sites for ascetic practice under waterfalls, centers of folk medicine, the dwellings of shamanistic suppliants (*kitōshi* 祈禱師) and diviners (*jujutsushi* 呪術師), and the so-called Korean temples (see IIDA 1988). There is a constant turnover among these small groups as new ones arise and others disappear.

According to the results published by the Shūkyōshakaigaku no Kai, the activity of the religious believers in the Ikoma area is quite different depending on whether they are associated with the large temples and shrines or with the small religious associations. Let us begin with the large temples and shrines. In general, temples and shrines large enough to transcend local concerns cultivate religious faith in rural areas by establishing *kō* 講 associations, passing out amulets, and inviting visits to the headquarters. However, most of the visitors to the Ikoma mountain range are irregular callers from the urban areas of the Kinki region. Thus *kō*-type systematic organizations have remained quite undeveloped; the central concern seems to be more with how to most efficiently develop ways to systematize their reputation for being able to provide religious benefits (*goriyaku* ご利益), thus reflecting modern religious trends. The management of temple/shrine lodgings (*shukubō* 宿坊) is one of these means—it is an important source of income but does not necessarily involve religious propagation. These lodgings are thus very similar to religious centers connected with the Shikoku pilgrimages. The temples along the Shikoku *henro* route also rely on the collective religious activity of the pilgrimage, and the lodgings connected with the temples constitute an important source of income for them. This kind of religious phenomenon is one of the typical aspects of religion in contemporary Japan.

In the case of the small religious facilities that dot the landscape in Ikoma, however, irregular visitors are very rare. Most of the people are regular followers who gather together as a result of the spiritual powers, personality, and/or charisma of a certain religious individual. These small associations are organized around a religious figure who has usually undergone religious austerities in various places in the mountains, has attained some sort of spiritual ability, and can display supra-normal power. Sometimes a *kō*-like association forms, and every now and then the group grows into an even larger organization. For the most part, however, a wide range of believers are drawn together on the basis of a one-to-one personal relationship with the religious leader. Neither is it unusual for a new group to form around some-

one who was originally a part of another association. In the case of Ishikiri-jinja, for example, there are more than one hundred small-scale *kō* affiliated with this shrine, each based on individual relationships with the founders of the *kō*. Many of these founders are women called *ogamiya* 拝み屋 (worshipers). They are not only active as the founders of their *kō*, but often have received teaching certification from places such as Ishikiri, Ikoma Seiten, Mt Kōya, Fushimi Inari, and so forth. They also perform shamanistic activities in their private homes.

Here we can see the double-layered structure of these religious organizations. They have some sort of affiliation with "established" religious organizations, but they also have a side to them that deviates from the boundaries of the traditional teachings and doctrines of the established organizations. In fact it is precisely this aspect that tends to attract followers. This is an important point to keep in mind in discussing the question of orthodoxy and heresy, or in considering the dialectic between religious creativity and the continuity of traditional doctrines and organizations.

In any case, the Shūkyōshakaigaku no Kai has shown that this type of religious association is a gathering that has its roots in the ordinary everyday network of human relations and that takes form through the mediation of various types of spiritual leaders. One of the characteristics of this kind of group is a certain pattern or process of concrete religious experience—e.g., someone has an incurable disease© prayers are made to specific kami or buddhas© there is an experience of miraculous healing© gratitude is shown to the kami or buddhas in the form of obligation or repaying obligation© various benefits continue to appear© one's spiritual experience is transmitted to other people© a *kō* organization is formed. This process is much the same as the relationship between a *hijiri* and his followers, i.e., it is a relationship between one who passes on meaning and the one who receives this transmission—in this case the transmission of spiritual experience. Similar forms of the transmission of spiritual experience can also be seen in the various pilgrimage traditions in Japan, such as the Shikoku pilgrimage. The fluidity of both sides can be said to act effectively as a force for promoting a religious system of meaning. In the case of Ikoma, it provides an important opportunity to link together individuals alienated by urban life.[15]

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[15] SHIMAZONO (1987) points out that, along with the advance of urbanization since the beginning of the twentieth century, numerous small-scale religious associations influenced

Conclusions

The contemporary urban dweller encounters religion through the mediation of a *hijiri*-type figure. This encounter, however, has not been as stable as when *hijiri* successfully put down roots in rural villages across Japan between the late sixteenth century and the seventeenth century. The organized religions that try to manage and control sacred meaning; the *hijiri*-type figures who actually come in contact with and attempt to supply this meaning to believers and followers; the bloated urbanization of modern society that continues to erode the sense of community—all three of these factors lack stability in the present world. Thus the system of meaning that runs through these three unstable factors is also unstable, undergoing constant growth and change. The least that can be said is that contemporary folk/popular religion (*minzoku shūkyō*), unlike the folk religion (*minkan shinkō*) of the past, has ceased to represent a system of meaning that provides a comprehensive order to the daily life of people in general.

Moreover, the religious world revealed to urban dwellers by contemporary *hijiri*—for example, the practice of *mizuko kuyō* 水子供養 (memorials for aborted or still-born children) so popular in recent years—can be compared to a hasty theatrical performance, a play or game in which each player performs his/her part for a limited time and space. The study of ethnology (*minzokugaku*)—as long as it attempts to be a science based on fieldwork—must continue its work with an awareness of the relationship between society and religion as outlined above.

Finally, there must be a reevaluation of our concept of the city, and we must be aware of the recent historical development of urban society. There has been a tendency to view the city as nothing more than an extension of the traditional village, or merely as a mechanism for coordinating the production of the farm village. However, the modern city exists today as a completely different social concept and space, and the search for the meaning and significance of the city as a city is one of the currents of modern social history. And, as in the past, *hijiri*-type figures will undoubtedly, in many places and social situations, play a vital role as the conduit for giving birth to religious meaning and persuasion.

by syncretistic religions and New Religions have sprung up in urban areas. For concrete case-studies of the origins and activities of religious associations that arose with a *hijiri* as a medium, see MIYAKE 1981 and YOSHIDA 1986.

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