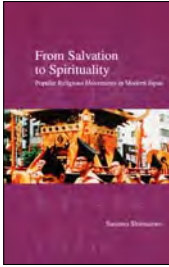


REVIEWS



Shimazono Susumu, *From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan*

Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2004. x+348 pp. US\$34.95, paper, ISBN 1-876843-13-6.

SHIMAZONO SUSUMU, a professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Tokyo, is one of the foremost scholars of the contemporary religious scene in Japan, and his work has often been reviewed in the *JJRS* (see, for example, Ian Reader's review article on Shimazono's work in *JJRS* 20 [1993]: 229–48). His research and writing on Aum Shinrikyo have provided fascinating insights into the growth and thinking of this extraordinary movement, and his vast number of publications on Japan's new religions and Japanese religious history stretching from the 1970s has provided Japanese and foreign scholars with an incredibly rich gold mine of material to help them with their own research.

Shimazono's most recent English-language publication, *From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan*, is a rich anthology of his articles on Japan's religions written between 1981 and 2003. The introduction and sixteen chapters of this volume previously appeared in such journals as the *JJRS*, the *Journal of Oriental Studies*, the *Journal of Alternative Religion and Culture*, and *Social Compass*, as well as chapters in various edited anthologies on Japanese religion.

Shimazono's focus in this book is on the phenomenal growth of Japan's new religions since the Meiji era, and of more recent new spiritual movements and culture in Japan. He examines the reasons for their popular appeal, the impact that they have had on Japanese culture and on the evolution of contemporary Japanese society, and on the spread of these movements abroad. He believes this work is especially important because today roughly half of Japan's actively religious practitioners are involved with the new religions and spirituality activities, and that these movements are having a profound effect on contemporary Japanese society.

The book is divided into five distinct sections. A lengthy introduction provides a very useful overview of the development of Japan's new religions from the earliest, Nyoraikyō, a group that emerged in the early nineteenth century, to the evolution of the "Spiritual World" since the 1980s. The first section, "Japan's New Religions in the Broader Scheme," examines the role of new religions and the sociology of religion in Japan, the religious influences that these religions have had on Japan's modernization

since the Meiji era, and the role that “salvation religions” play in modern society. The second section consists of three excellent chapters on “Lotus Sutra-Based New Religions” and the influence of the Nichiren School on a variety of Japan’s more prominent religious organizations, including the Sōka Gakkai.

Part III provides perspectives on a wide variety of new religions and “Spiritual Movements” that have grown in prominence in Japan over the past two to three decades.

Topics include the diverse trends of millennialism in modern Japanese religious history, the growth of “New Spirituality Movements” in Japan including “naturalistic religiosity” (which includes such factors as “alternative knowledge movements (AKMs),” “alternative medicine,” and “alternative agriculture” and “AKMs and new spirituality movements”) and a broad discussion of the growth of psychotherapeutic religion in Japan.”

Part IV, “Religions and Spiritual Movements After the 1970s,” looks at the growth of “new new religions” and “spirituality” in the 1980s and beyond, the spread of Japan’s new religions abroad, a comparison of the major distinctions between the new religions such as the Sōka Gakkai that came of age in the immediate postwar era and those which grew in prominence in the 1970s, 1980s and beyond, and two final chapters, “New Spirituality Movements and the Spiritual Intellectuals” and “‘New Age Movements’ or ‘New Spirituality Movements and Culture.’”

Since I have been studying the Sōka Gakkai movement since the mid-1970s, I am especially interested in Shimazono’s 1999 essay, “Sōka Gakkai and the Modern Reformation of Buddhism,” which first appeared in *Buddhist Spirituality: Later China, Korea, Japan, and the Modern World* (ed. Takeuchi Yoshinori, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, pp. 435–54). Here Shimazono prefaces his work with the question, “In a world of rapid change, progressively urbanized and information-intensive, what transformations are taking place in Buddhist practice and in the community?” (109). What follows is a lengthy discussion of the doctrines developed by Toda Jōsei (1900–1958), who rebuilt the Sōka Gakkai after World War II, on the “Doctrine of Life Force.” Shimazono states that Toda’s idea of life-force was a significant move away from the theology of the Nichiren Shōshū sect and of the Gakkai’s founder, Makiguchi Tsunesaburō (1871–1944). Shimazono writes that what is of supreme interest here is how this idea of life-force “reshaped the traditional teachings of Nichiren Shōshū in the direction of a belief in this-worldly salvation that is typical of popular Buddhist movements in East Asia in the modern period” (110–11).

The only minor faults of the book lie in its status of a collected anthology of articles written over a span of more than two decades. Despite the fact that the editors have carefully grouped the chapters in terms of topic, the transitions between articles at times can be rather rough. Some of the chapters are also a bit dated. The piece on Japanese new religions abroad was published in 1991 and no apparent effort has been made to update the article. Much has happened to these religions abroad since the early 1990s and some of these developments should have been noted here.

There are also minor inconsistencies and blemishes that should have been corrected through more careful copy editing.

Despite these minor flaws, this work is an invaluable resource for every scholar in the field. This rich volume belongs in the library of every serious student of modern Japan because of the wealth of truly scholarly information and insights, not only on present-day Japanese religion but also on contemporary Japanese society as a whole. The diversity of topics discussed in considerable depth and wisdom is remarkable.

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