

## NIHON NO SHŪKYŌ: MINZOKU NO SHŪKYŌ-SHI

日本の宗教, 民族の宗教史

(Religions of Japan: A History of the Religions of the People)

*By Yukio Kuki 久木幸男.*  
*Tokyo 1965. 195 pp. ¥290.*

To write a history of Japanese religions is an extremely difficult task indeed. Partly due to the complexities of the subject, and partly due to the complicate languages used in particular groups, historical writings on Japanese religions have hardly escaped confusions and contradictions. The present volume by Mr. Yuki, however, is astoundingly clear. That he has made the history of Japanese religions easily accessible to readers at large is worthy of a meritorious comment.

Much of the clarity of this book is owed to the clarity of the writer's frame of reference in his observing

historical materials, i.e., his intentional limitation of perspective upon the people. At the outset I assumed that the writer was a materialist in his view point, but upon reading the entire volume, my impression in this respect had to be amended. But the fact that I was induced to such an impression may reveal the type of the technique with which the present work is written, and perhaps the writer's view of history.

The lack of a certain fixed view point often leads a writer astray in the piles of documents and sources. The present work proves that the

writer did not commit this error, and that a systematization of the subject is possible.

The book contains four chapters and fifteen sections. Chapter One, *Religion of Life and Sex*, consists of three sections, *Struggles for Life*, *Hymn to Life and Sex*, and *Emergence of New Life*. Chapter Two, *Division of Labor among Gods*, is composed of four sections, *From Magic King to Man God*, *The Established Religion and the People's Religion*, *Foreign Gods Arrive and Settle*, and *The Genesis and Evolution of Functional Gods*. Chapter Three, *Man Stronger than Gods*, includes four sections, *Struggles Between God and Man*, *Refutation of the Saving in the Land of Bliss*, *Man's Victory Over Gods*, and *Religion of Resistance*. The four sections in Chapter Four, *The Age of New Religions*, are titled *Survivals of the Old Gods*, *Battles against Persecutions*, *Toward a Religious Revolution*, and *Religious Problems Today*, respectively. The text is further classified into some 160 subdivisions, so that almost every page introduces a new subject. Such quantitative limitation is inescap-

able when the book of this size covers the entire history of Japanese religions. But this same limitation contributes to the clarity of the description, which I would the soonest attribute to the writer's unique ability.

To make a synopsis of this small book is not easy. Paraphrasing a book so well written deprives the merit of it, and adds nothing. The book is pleasant to read, and devoid of professional jargon. I would, therefore, express my personal impressions upon several passages, while leaving to the reader its general interpretation.

To begin with, I would like to discuss the author's view of religion. He states:

Thus, religion is related more closely to life than to death. It was always in the severe struggles of life that religion was needed. Never was it for the sake of the dead. The rites of the dead, such as funeral ceremonies and annual festivals, have been held for the sake of the living and not for the sake of the dead.

The factors of expectation for religion differed under different social and historical situations. How did they differ? How did the religion of the age respond to the expectation of the times? How do they influence the contem-

porary Japanese religions? How did the religious zeal of yore turn into the secularist indifferentism of today? Hoping to answer these questions, we reflect the history of the Japanese since the ambiguous divine ages till the present age. The writer assumes that religion is what exists among the people who are struggling to live and what is owned by the living even if it sometimes looks as if it is an exercise for the sake of the dead.

The author must have accumulated ample informations and pursued careful reasoning before he arrived at this definition of religion. But this important thesis or hypothesis is by no means fully explained in this volume, and is taken for granted. As a Shinto scholar and a Shinto follower, I am ready to agree with his emphasis on the place of the living in religion. But when he goes so far as to state, "The rites of the dead, such as funeral ceremonies and annual festivals, have been held for the sake of the living, and not for the sake of the dead," he commits the error of identifying his personal idea with the phenomenon of religion. No matter how significant is the festival of the spirit of the dead for the surviving, it is improper to neglect

or nullify the realm of the dead, provided the observer remains sincere to the phenomenon of religion. The writer seems to regard the life after death and the epiphany of the divine beings as products of the under developed mentality, and disregard the elements of the religious time, being and meaning. Although I admire a book written comprehensively and concisely, I do not mean to say that comprehensiveness and conciseness may sacrifice any other aspect. I regret that the writer skipped the important process.

I am confused to be told about *kami* like this. Unlike his statement I would distinguish at least three different uses of the word *kami*: 1) divinity or the divine nature as found in a phrase like *kami-man*, 2) the incarnation of Buddha as stated in a motto, "A man of faith is equal to Buddha," and 3) the expression for theophany as has descended from the primitive ages.

I admit that, if a foreigner should deal with Japanese religions, he would be forced to apply some sort of general scheme or broad classifications. But, Japanese specialists who major in the subject and who work in Japan need not imitate

their methods of schematization or classification, which always remain inappropriate in detail. If *kami* and Buddha had been identified in the religious consciousness of the Japanese, a discussion on a pre-supposition that Shinran conceived *kami* and Buddha in the same manner as the mass did will never approach the truth.

In discussing the syncretism of Buddhism and Shinto, Mr. Yuki states as follows:

The relation between the original Buddha and the *kami* as its incarnation is differently explained in various documents. But the fact that *kami* and Buddha came to be related to each other indicates that *kami* became particularized and that their particular quality sought affiliation with those of Buddhas. In other words, *kami* which had been the undistinguishable *power* came to own a characteristic which resembled a specific quality of a Buddha, and the similarity of the characters of the *kami* and Buddha brought them together to the birth of the incarnation theory. Therefore, the formation of the incarnation theory was not only the summit of the ancient pantheon of *kami* but also the indication of the division of labor among *kami* and their personification.

This statement is another example which I cannot readily follow. In my opinion, Japanese *kami* had always been particularistic, either in terms of their functions or of the rituals with which they were served.

It may have been the fact, as the author says, that "... by the eighth or ninth century, major objects of worship came to include Gautama, Amida, Yakushi, Kannon, and Mikuroku, all of which owned unique characteristics," and that the corresponding characteristics of *kami* and Buddha came to join each other. But *kami* was bound by history, was served with particularistic rituals, and was worshipped by a particular clan or a local community, since the earliest times. It came to obtain universalistic elements only after it was related to the original Buddha, and thus it fully transcended the limitations of clan, locality, and community life. The author's treatment upon this important question is oversimplified, and over-schematic as to nullify the doubt that any historian would raise.

I could refer to many such instances. I am not in agreement with the author's view point as a whole, which, I would assume, is due to the difference of our approach to the history of religions. Indicating that there is a reader who is not totally convinced by his argument, I would urge the author to clarify his own approach and historical view point, as I believe it a writer's responsibility.

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