

Approaches East and West to the History of Religions Four Japanese Thinkers

OKUYAMA Michiaki

奥山倫明

In Japan recently, new overviews for the comparative study of the history of religions have been presented. Taking into account the plurality of Japanese religions, religious studies scholar Yamaori Tetsuo has reevaluated the theories of the history of Japanese religions. Umesao Tadao, a leading ethnologist and scholar in the comparative study of civilizations, reviews the historical phases of religions East and West on the Eurasian continent with his theory of the "hypothesis of phasic correspondence." Murakami Yasusuke, a theoretical economist with expertise in Japanese history, studies the encounters between a nomadic society and an agricultural society in the light of Robert N. Bellah's theory of religious evolution to give insight into the origin of "historic religions." Another religious studies scholar, Shimazono Susumu, attempts to revise Bellah's theory both with a new framework on salvation religions and with an original understanding of "New Spirituality Movements."

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STATISTICS ON THE RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION of the Japanese are often a source of amusement. Experts estimate that over the past half century since the end of World War II approximately one-third of the Japanese population has believed in some religion or has had some religious faith. Yet the latest volume of the *Shūkyō nenkan*, an almanac of religious statistics published annually by the Department for Religious Affairs of the Agency of Cultural Affairs, reports that Shinto groups

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claim a total of about 105 million adherents; Buddhist groups, about 95 million; Christian groups, about 1.7 million; and other religious groups, about 11 million (BUNKACHŌ SHŪMUKA 1998, p. 31). This adds up to 212 million faithful, which is about 1.7 times the total population of the country. Hence the popular dictum that there are twice as many religious believers in Japan as there are Japanese people.

What kind of religion are we talking about to account for such puzzling results? It is often said in jest that the typical Japanese is born as a Shinto parishioner, married as a Christian, and buried as a Buddhist—referring to the custom of presenting infants at shrines for birth rituals, getting married in chapels before a minister or priest, and having funerary rites performed in temples. As generalizations go, this one is not too wide of the mark. Statistics regarding annual religious feasts show that approximately 60% of the Japanese visit a shrine or temple in early January as the first religious act of the New Year, and that almost the same number observe the festival of *o-bon*, traveling to the ancestral graves of their home town to honor the memory of deceased family members in traditional rituals. What is more, studies show that as many as 80% of the Japanese celebrate Christmas in some fashion or other (ISHII 1997), which suggests that at least culturally, if not religiously, Christianity is not without roots in an otherwise non-Christian country.

In order to help clarify these seemingly contradictory statistical data on religion in Japan, and to contribute to the current approaches used within religious studies, I present in this essay recent ideas of four Japanese scholars that are noteworthy in the comparative study of religion.

Yamaori Tetsuo: Rethinking the Study of Japanese Religions

Yamaori Tetsuo 山折哲雄 is one of the few scholars of religion who had the opportunity before the infamous Aum Affair of 1995 to talk with Matsumoto Chizuo (alias Asahara Shōkō), founder of Aum Shinrikyō. No doubt it was partly as a result of the ensuing events that Yamaori took up the question of the current state of Japanese religiosity in a series of articles, subsequently collected in 1997 under the title of *Shūkyō no hanashi*. But even apart from the connection with Aum, the views he presents in these articles are interesting in their own right.

In an article entitled “The Aum Affair and the End of Japanese Religions,” オウム真理教事件と日本宗教の終焉, Yamaori reflects on the general opposition to and distrust of religion, tracing the source of the current skepticism to a government policy enacted in the first year

of the Meiji era (1868) to keep Shinto separate from Buddhism, 神仏分離. The aim of this religious reform by the government, he argues, was to replace traditional ideas of the symbiosis of Shinto and Buddhism with the idea that one has to choose between the gods and the buddhas. Yamaori sees this face-off between the two religions as having exerted a decisive influence on the minds of the Japanese people up to the present day. When Japanese tourists abroad are asked about their religion, for example, they are likely to be perplexed and answer while blushing, "I don't have a religion," or "I guess I'm some kind of Buddhist." This in turn generates a negative self-image, so that one comes to think of oneself as religiously insincere or faithless. The real problem may lie in the question, not in the answer. To ask what religious group one is affiliated to presupposes that one has to opt for one particular religion and against others, and hence that the acquisition of faith is ultimately a matter of personal decision. Yamaori attributes these assumptions to the monotheistic worldview of Christianity, particularly Protestant Christianity. The idea that faith should be a conscious personal decision strikes many Japanese as a new, or at least unfamiliar way of thinking about religion. Yamaori continues:

At the base of Japanese religious ideas lies a view different from one that sees religion as a matter of conscious decision or subjective choice. The Japanese have rather located the ultimacy of faith in the complete eradication of all such decision or choice.... Ours has been a worldview that considers exclusive affiliation to a particular sect an essentially irreligious posture. (YAMAORI 1997, pp. 22–23)

For Yamaori the modern worldview imposed on the Japanese from above through the Meiji religious policy fundamentally differs from the traditional worldview in which the idea of exclusive affiliation to one religious group was absent:

Let us not take the matter lightly. The fact is, since the Meiji era many Japanese have pursued questions of the inner self from a Christian point of view, even though they are not themselves Christians. Standing within a Christian worldview, we have looked into our non-Christian inner lives as if by conditioned reflex and forfeited our own native religious quest in order to answer yes or no to the questions of others.

We have observed our innermost hearts in the light of the religious ideas of outsiders. And this sort of absurd distortion of thinking is not confined to religious ideas. Since the Meiji era we Japanese have been more or less forced to submit to it in the way we characterize ourselves in general. The policy of

separating Shinto and Buddhism inaugurated in the first year of Meiji thus marks the starting point of a distorted Japanese self-characterization in the modern period.

(YAMAORI 1997, p. 23)

By way of this historical argument Yamaori argues convincingly against the idea that belonging to two or three religious groups, or embracing diverse religious customs, is embarrassing or ridiculous. On the contrary, a number of Japanese scholars of religion like Yamaori have tried to draw the religious life of the ordinary Japanese people into the explanatory framework of religious studies. Although the details of these attempts go beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that an understanding of religion based on the actual religious situation of the Japanese, even where that basis is not fully articulated, has already yielded some interesting results. There is every reason to suppose that future efforts in this direction will help to clarify an understanding of religion different from the monotheistic or Christian approaches of traditional religious studies. We see some initial examples of this in the field of the history of religions.

Umesao Tadao: The History of Religions East and West

Although it was published over forty years ago, Umesao Tadao's 梅棹忠夫 essay, "An Ecological Perspective on the History of Civilizations" 文明の生態史観, remains one of the most original and influential, if also controversial, theories on history to appear in Japan after World War II. In particular, the bridge with which he links ecological theory to the history of religions is of enduring interest. Here I would like to single out certain key ideas from his *Comparative Studies of Civilization* 比較文明学研究, a collection of essays in which his view of the differences between Eastern and Western religions stand out in clear relief.

Umesao takes up a comparison of the histories of Buddhism and Christianity, each of which he views as antithetical in nature. Buddhism began in northern India but is virtually nonexistent there today. (In India today less than 0.1% of the population is Buddhist.) Christianity's birthplace was in the ancient Orient but today is occupied by the Jewish nation of Israel and surrounded for the most part by Islamic nations. Umesao extrapolates from these examples a model of religious displacement. In northern India, Brahmanism was displaced by Buddhism, which in turn was displaced by Hinduism. In the Orient, Judaism was displaced by Christianity, which in turn was displaced by Islam. In comparing these two patterns of displacement, each involv-

ing three different religions, Umesao suggests that Brahmanism may be seen as the counterpart of Judaism, Buddhism of Christianity, and Hinduism of Islam. From there he hypothesizes that other examples of this three-phased pattern of religious displacement may be found elsewhere in history—an idea he dubs the “hypothesis of phasic correspondence” (段階対応の仮説) (UMESAO 1989, pp. 220–21).

Umesao develops this idea by way of analogy with epidemiology. Religions that diffuse and propagate themselves—the so-called world or universal religions that transcend the boundaries of the country or culture in which they originated—he refers to as “epidemic.” Native, indigenous religions—the so-called ethnic or folk religions—he refers to as “endemic.” Brahmanism and Judaism are examples of native, ethnic religions that can be compared in an endemic model. Buddhism and Christianity, in contrast, emerged as reform movements from within what were originally indigenous religions (UMESAO 1989, p. 278). They represent a second, epidemic phase in which the initial endemic quality of the religion is transformed to allow for diffusion beyond the locus of origin. In general terms and within the limited context of the Old World, we speak of Buddhism as having traveled to the east and Christianity to the west, the former reaching Japan and the latter reaching western Europe (p. 223). Hinduism and Islam belong to religions of the third phase that aim at rejuvenating a religion of the first phase and rallying people behind it (p. 285). Both Hinduism and Islam, he notes, share in the diffusive trait of the second phase: Islam has spread itself widely throughout the world, while Hinduism has ventured into Southeast Asia to include Cambodia and Indonesia (p. 280).

Turning to the Mediterranean basin and China during the latter half of the first millennium BCE, we see a parallel situation in the emergence of cluster or urban-based civilizations that blossomed into great ancient empires (p. 244). In the West, Alexander the Great of Macedonia unified the eastern Mediterranean, the Orient, and Persia in the fourth century BCE. In the East, Emperor Shi-huangdi of the Qin dynasty brought about the unification of Huang He and the Yangtze River valleys a century later. These world-unifications were succeeded by the Roman Empire and the Han Empire respectively, which were to provide cradles for the birth of Christianity and Buddhism in the centuries that followed. Buddhism broadened the base of its influence during the Six-Dynasty period in China, especially from the fourth to the sixth century CE, while in the Roman Empire Christianity established itself as the state religion in the fourth century CE.

Umesao tries to explain the history of China and the Mediter-

anean by applying his “hypothesis of phasic correspondence.” Prior to the arrival of Buddhism in the first century CE, Confucian thought had developed out of the ethnic religion of ancient China, which may be considered the religion of the first phase. After the arrival of Buddhism, a religion of the second phase, more ethnic, magical forms of religion surfaced as a rival to Buddhism, representing a kind of “rallying call” to native traditions. This third-phase religion was Taoism. Thus the history of Chinese religions after the introduction of Buddhism can be described as a symbiosis of Confucianism (including later Neo-Confucianism), Buddhism, and Taoism (pp. 294 ff).

In the Mediterranean world, the first phase prior to the arrival of Christianity is characterized principally by the pantheon of Greek and Roman divinities, schools of Greek philosophy, diverse mystery religions, and later forms of emperor worship. Christianity’s appearance sparked a collision with the Roman pantheon and emperor worship, which led to its persecution, while at the same time it incorporated Greek philosophy into its doctrine and certain elements of mystery religions into its liturgy. Umesao sees this as Christianity’s assimilation of first-phase religions. Islam, in turn, represents the third-phase religion of the Mediterranean world, where it has coexisted with Christianity (pp. 302 ff).

The Mediterranean basin and China represent centers of civilization at whose peripheries we find western Europe on the one hand and Japan on the other. Concomitant with the spread of Christianity, ethnic nations came into being in eighth- and ninth-century western Europe, while the spread of Buddhism in the Japanese archipelago inspired the founding of the Japanese nation, particularly during the reign of Emperor Shōmu 聖武天皇 in the eighth century. In western Europe, the Mediterranean world and the German world were soon unified into a single Catholic world with Latin as its lingua franca. In East Asia, as the Mahāyāna sūtras were translated into Chinese, a unified sphere of civilization crystallized around Mahāyāna Buddhism and classical Chinese (pp. 253–57).

The birthplaces of great civilizations like those of China, India, and the rest of the Orient, therefore show three phases of religious development: indigenous ethnic religions, world religions, and the rejuvenation of indigenous religions. But indigenous-ethnic religions in civilizations at the periphery of these developments, such as we find in Japan, Southeast Asia, and Europe, were not able to rally support sufficient to rout the onslaught of the world religions. The closest thing to a third phase is a syncretism in which the indigenous religions are assimilated into the religions of the second phase. The ven-

eration of Mary or the saints in the Catholic world, and *shinbutsu shūgō* 神仏習合 (the fusion of gods and buddhas) in Japan, are both examples of this phenomenon (p. 315).

This, in sum, is the structure Umesao's comparative history of Eastern and Western religions up to the time of the Middle Ages. The two world religions, Buddhism and Christianity, each of them second-phase developments, were forced out of their places of birth by religions of the third phase. Hinduism rallied to edge Buddhism out of India and to the east; Islam rejuvenated native religiosity in the Orient to drive Christianity westward. Mahāyāna Buddhism traveled to China where it formed the backbone of a unified sphere of East Asian civilization; Christianity traveled to the Mediterranean basin where it became the spiritual center of European civilization in the form of the Catholic Church. And at the outermost edges of these historical developments—namely, in Japan and western Europe—the two religions experienced syncretism with minor indigenous religions.

Umesao's approach to the comparative history of religions can, I believe, shed new light on the question of the symbiosis of religions in Japan with which I opened this essay. It might also prompt a rethinking of the way the West understands the history of Christianity. In any event, his hypothesis of phasic correspondence is just that—a *hypothesis*. It needs to be tested and complemented by other approaches to the origin and development of world religions like Buddhism and Christianity. It is to one such example that I turn my attention next.

Murakami Yasusuke: The Origin of Historic Religions

Since the 1979 publication of *The "Household" Society as a Form of Civilization* 文明としてのイエ社会, a work he coauthored with Kumon Shunpei 公文俊平 and Satō Seizaburō 佐藤誠三郎, Murakami Yasusuke 村上泰亮 has given us a novel perspective on historic religions, based in part on ideas advanced by the sociologist Robert N. Bellah. In an article titled "Religious Evolution," Bellah organizes human religious history into five stages: primitive, archaic, historic, early modern, and modern. The term "historic religions" as used in Bellah's and Murakami's scheme corresponds to what most scholars of religion refer to as "world religions" or "universal religions." Murakami summarizes his view on historic religions in one of his later works:

Around the middle period of the first millennium before the Common Era, what Karl Jaspers calls "the Axial Age," the systematization of transcendental thinking emerged in three

areas of the world: the Mediterranean area around Greece, the subcontinent of India, and the valley of the Huang He. These areas are represented by Greek philosophies, Hindu ideas including Buddhism, and the ideas of the Hundred Schools of philosophy, including Confucianism. "Philosophy," as we call it today, started then and there. We regard these ideas as belonging to the ideas of "historic religions" or the foundations of historic religions. We also think of Christianity and Islam of later ages as historic religions because they were generated as the result of hybridizing other religions or philosophies of diverse kinds.¹ (MURAKAMI 1992, p. 487)

The transcendental thinking referred to entails the pursuit of self-reflection, each reflection itself submitted to further reflection, leading the self in its ascent to a point where it can look down on its own activity of reflection. As such philosophical work is obviously a severe strain on the cognitive skills of ordinary men and women, Murakami reasons that historic religions all represent attempts to cut the self-reflective process short by introducing absolute divine beings or principles into their teachings. In this way, as he sees it, they provide guiding images by means of which the essence of transcendental thinking can be shared with ordinary believers (p. 486).

Murakami then goes on to place the historic religions—thus viewed as systematizations of transcendental thinking—within the history of civilizations. After the "agricultural revolutions" that are said to have occurred some ten thousand years ago, social organization became more complex. As a particular agricultural society grew in size, its structure became hierarchical through the expansion of the principles of kinship. The hierarchical differentiation that accompanied social expansion needed a legitimating theory to effect an integration of the whole. The mythological systematization of deities stepped in to play this role on the ideological level. This kind of religion centered on what Murakami calls "the mythology of hierarchization" corresponds to what Bellah calls "archaic religion" (MURAKAMI 1998, pp. 86-90).

The three regions of classical civilization mentioned above (China, India, and Greece and Rome) differ from prior agricultural civilizations. Murakami refers to them as "second agricultural civilizations," distinct from "first agricultural civilizations." The great spiritual revolutions that rocked these regions occurred approximately around the

¹ An English translation of this work was published as *An Anticlassical Political-Economic Analysis: A Vision for the Next Century* (Stanford University Press) in 1996, with an introduction by the translator Kozo Yamamura. The translations here are my own.

same period as what Bellah calls historic religions. The historic religions are marked by a transcendental worldview centered on an otherworldly monotheistic creator or an abstract cosmic principle, and by the offer of a way of salvation to human beings both within society and beyond it. The appearance of this form of religion stimulated the growth of the great empires of the classical world. As to why the historic religions emerged in those three areas roughly at the same time, around the middle of the first millennium BCE, Murakami points to the encounter, communication, and interaction of two completely different worlds, namely, stable agricultural society and nomadic pastoral society (MURAKAMI 1998, pp. 90–92). He reasons that nomadic society, like agricultural society, is organized on the kinship principle, but in terms of its military organization, its hierarchy needs to be flexible enough to respond to changing needs. Nomadic society is also marked by a relatively simple lifestyle, a rationalized meritocracy, and a general impartiality to the origins of its people. With the first agricultural civilization reaching the requisite level of affluence on the one hand, and nomadic societies reaching the requisite level of organizational strength and military power on the other, the inevitable encounter of these two worlds took place—in the form of aggression by the latter against the former.

Nomadic pastoral societies appear in the interior steppes of the Eurasian continent already before the third millennium BCE. During the second millennium a dramatic drop in temperatures occurred, as recent archaeological analyses of climactic changes confirm, which might have prompted the so-called Indo-Europeans to migrate from their original lands in search of a more inhabitable environment. In Murakami's view, these migratory waves of nomads are what brought agricultural society into contact with nomadic society, which in turn led to some form or other of synthesis of previously heterogeneous ways of life. In the course of this synthesis, there must have emerged a more universal idea of humanity, which could explain the birth of the historic religions (MURAKAMI 1992, p. 511; 1998, pp. 93–98).

Regarding the role of human reflection in all of this, Murakami distinguishes hermeneutical from transcendental reflection. Transcendental reflection posits the post-reflective self as superior to the pre-reflective, divorcing the self from the life-world as a cognitive subject that looks down at it from the heights. Hermeneutical reflection reverses the order, seeing the pre-reflective self as superior, inserting itself into the life-world as a constitutive ingredient (MURAKAMI 1992, p. 482). Accepting the terms of this dichotomy, Murakami claims that transcendental thinking is represented in historic religions, whereas

hermeneutical thinking, in which an endless succession of worldviews are superimposed one on another, pervades history in accumulations of oral and textual worldviews.

Bellah notes in passing that historic religion “emerged in societies that were more or less literate and so have fallen chiefly under the discipline of history rather than that of archaeology or ethnography” (BELLAH 1991, p. 32). Murakami goes further, arguing that historic religions are independent of history and that their supporting transcendental ideas do not need historical justification, in contrast to previous forms of religion in which mythology is interwoven with historical fact (MURAKAMI 1992, p. 496). Murakami summarizes as follows:

There is much room for speculation on the origin of historic religions, but it is probably related to the “great encounters” that took place between the nomadic tribes who migrated southward from the steppes of inner Eurasia (for example, so-called Indo-Aryans) and the agricultural tribes in the southern parts of the continent, a migration resulting from an increased frigidity of climate around the middle period of the second millennium BCE.... The great encounters occurred in three areas: the eastern Mediterranean area and Greece, the valleys of the Indus and the Ganges, and the valley of the Huang He. The origin of the three types of historic religions (or philosophies) evidently corresponds to these encounters. Historic religions are most probably the result of the endeavor to facilitate coexistence between two kinds of people, one of nomadic pasturage and the other of agriculture, by universalizing their different life experiences into abstract concepts and general theorems that would serve to integrate the heterogeneous cultures. In other words, the great encounters brought about a situation that could not be reconciled by the mutual toleration of hermeneutical thinking. It demanded a systematization of transcendental thinking able to oversee different worldviews from above. (MURAKAMI 1992, p. 511)

Once formed, the historic religions became the backbone for the organization of the great civilizations whose societies spread the influences of the historic religions into neighboring societies. Thus from the fifth to the eighth century CE, the historic religion from China exerted influence on the ancient religions in Japan, much the same as Christianity did on the German religions. China’s influence over Japan remained on an ideological level because of the geopolitical distance that separated the two; the concrete power exerted over the German tribes by the center of European civilization came to an

end with the collapse of the Roman Empire. Western Europe and Japan, poised at opposite extremes of the Eurasian continent, did not therefore take over the macropolitical order from the great civilizations. Instead each gave rise, around the same time, to its own decentralized political and economic structures. This, Murakami argues, accounts for the parallel appearance of “feudalism” in the two areas (MURAKAMI 1992, pp. 511–13).

Where Umesao uses his “hypothesis of phasic correspondence” to develop a comparison of Buddhism and Christianity, Murakami adopts Bellah’s discussion of historic religion to deal with the spiritual revolutions in the Mediterranean world, India, and China during the Axial Age. Needless to say, they do not always concur in their conclusions. For example, Umesao locates Confucianism and the ancient religions of China in the first phase, prior to the emergence of the world religions, while Murakami classifies Confucianism and its contemporary religious forms among the historic religions. Still, there are notable parallels in their discussions of Christianity and Buddhism. Both agree that the two religions probably took shape as a result of historical ethnic migrations and in this sense represent a step beyond the religions of their native lands, the one traveling west, the other east. Their comparisons of religious history in Europe and in East Asia, it would seem, represent an important step in the direction of rethinking secondary encounters between world religions and indigenous religions as well.

Bellah’s schematization of religious history into five stages has also inspired another Japanese scholar to reconsider the history of religions in a global perspective. I conclude my account of new Japanese approaches to the study of the history of religions with a brief look at his work.

Shimazono Susumu: Religions of Salvation

Buddhism and Christianity, which Umesao discussed from the perspective of the history of civilizations, and the historic religions, which Murakami addressed in terms of Bellah’s five stages of the evolution of religion, can also, from another perspective, be seen as religions of salvation. Since the publication of his book *Religions of Salvation in Contemporary Society* 現代救済宗教論 in 1992, Shimazono Susumu 島菌進 has undertaken a concerted review of the place and meaning of religions of salvation within the framework of global religious history.

In his introductory chapter, Shimazono sets out to define what he means by “religions of salvation.” To begin with, talk of salvation

belongs to a worldview in which human existence is seen to be accompanied by suffering and limitations. The experience of hardship and frustration drives people to reflect on their past and to deepen their understanding of the world. The liberation from suffering or transcendence of limitations that comes through a reinterpretation of the meaning of one's life in the world marks a critical turning point. It completely transforms one's outlook on life and the world. This, we may say, is the moment at which salvation is realized. Whether it occurs in a once-and-for-all experience or unfolds gradually over time, the effect is the same: a line is drawn between life and world before salvation and life and world after it (SHIMAZONO 1992, pp. 7-8).

With this general idea of salvation in tow, we may define religions of salvation as religions that hold out the promise of such liberation and transformation of perspective, and offer a means to achieve it. In the sense that the experience of salvation divides an individual's life into a before and an after, we may also speak of a kind of existential "dualism" at play. The main point Shimazono wishes to make is that salvation entails a reorientation of one's way of viewing the things of life. "The axis that cuts through human limitations on the one hand and some sort of transcendent reality from beyond on the other, through the contrast between suffering and hope, lends stability to convictions that nothing can shake loose" (SHIMAZONO 1992, p. 9). What is more, religions whose ideological and ritual systems are oriented towards salvation tend to sustain and promote institutional order in both individual existence and in society at large.

Leaving Shimazono's idea of religions of salvation with that brief résumé, we have next to see how it leads to a new model for understanding the history of religions. In his view, premodern culture and society fell more or less under the influence of religions of salvation, which he sees as having assumed the form of historic religions in Belah's sense of the term. In the process of modernization, historic religions were obliged to respond in some measure to the changes taking place in culture and society. But beyond these adjustments of traditional religion, a new type of salvation-oriented religion was to appear in the modern age. These "new religions" as Shimazono classifies them have taken over part of the role played by the traditional religions of salvation. This is especially the case in Japan, though it is also true in the United States. Among the defining traits of these new religions are this-worldly salvation, ideas of self-help, mass appeal, stress on personal experience, and organization based on meritocracy (SHIMAZONO 1992, pp. 13-19).

Interestingly enough, these same characteristics of new religions

can be applied to those forms of popular Protestantism in the United States referred to as sects. Turning once again to Bellah's five-stage schema, we find his idea of "early modern religion" is based mainly on Protestantism. Shimazono's idea of religions of salvation suggests a revision of Bellah's model by situating both Protestantism and new religions in a stage that follows historic religions. In this sense his work represents a milestone on the way to new comparative studies in the history of religions that are not confined to models drawn from Christian history.

Shimazono's inquiries are not confined to organized religion but extend to the more unregulated contemporary religions as well. He enriches his idea of religions of salvation with original observations regarding what he calls New Spirituality Movements 新靈性運動. These movements, which have attracted a great deal of attention from other scholars in Japan, can be described as networks aimed at the spread of a new way of thinking, one that transcends the usual opposition between religion and science. He sees the New Age Movements that have thrived in Western countries since the late 1960s as a further example of this networking. In the concluding chapter to his book, Shimazono proposes the term "New Spirituality Movements" to cover a wide range of movements, including those of the West but cutting across to other cultures as well, aimed at the self-transformation of the individual.

As noted above, Shimazono sees new religions as religions of salvation that have taken on the role of the traditional historic religions of salvation. In the same way, New Spirituality Movements, though loose networks binding autonomous individuals and emphasizing self-help, show the same mass appeal and ability to mobilize large segments of the population that we see in the new religions. Although these movements reject the idea of salvation within a stable community, the mediation of salvation by personal gods or specially ordained individuals, and the kinds of mythological worldview found in traditional religion, they seem ready to accept traditional ideas of nature as well as traditional techniques for the control and expansion of consciousness. In addition, the New Spirituality Movements promote the search for the divine or spiritual presence within the world of nature and within human interiority (as opposed to the quest for spiritual realities that transcend the natural world and the human individual), the development of spiritual faculties in the autonomous subject, and the quest of spiritual awakening (SHIMAZONO 1992, pp. 234–40).

Shimazono returns to the question of the place of religions of salvation in the contemporary world in a more recent book, *New Spirituality*

Movements in Modern Societies 精神世界のゆくえ—現代世界と新靈性運動 (1996).² There he argues that religions of salvation, including historic religions, are presently seen as competing, on the one hand, with ecological movements advocating a return to archaic ideas from before the Axial Age, and, on the other hand, with New Spirituality Movements that seem to have ties to postmodernist trends (SHIMAZONO 1996, pp. 358 ff). As examples of the increasing influence of religions of salvation despite the competition, Shimazono points to the growth of new religions and sects as well as to the revitalization of Islam (pp. 376–79). In particular he singles out two tendencies of modern religions: a strong consumer-oriented commercialism, and a positive commitment to the public or political sphere (pp. 379–83). Needless to say, Islam presents a clear example of the latter.

In effect, then, Shimazono's focus on religions of salvation offers us a revision of Bellah's five-stage schematization of the evolution of religion, particularly as it touches on historic, early modern, and modern religions. Shimazono draws special attention, first, to new religions as one type among the early modern religions, and second, to the contemporary phenomenon of New Spirituality Movements, which he sees as rivaling religions of salvation both traditional and new. These latter oblige us to reconsider the concept of modern religions in Bellah's scheme and in religious studies in general, if only because some of these movements stress the individual to the point of advocating liberation from the yoke of communality found in the traditional religions. To read Shimazono's work is to come away with the sense that the study of religions emerging after the historic religions may be leading us to rethink the meaning of religion itself.

Conclusion

Following Yamaori Tetsuo's appeal for greater authenticity in the study of religion in Japan with its plurality of forms and the widespread tendency to avoid exclusive affiliation with any one particular religious institution, I have discussed the ideas of three Japanese scholars of religion. I selected these thinkers because they seemed to me to combine original thinking with a clear awareness of the religious reality of Japan, and did so within the general context of the comparative study of the history of religions. Each of them approach religion from a distinct perspective and with different academic credentials. Umesao

² See especially his final chapter, "Religions of Salvation and New Spirituality Movements: From the Axial Age to the Postmodern World" 救済宗教と新靈性運動—軸の時代からポストモダンへ.

Tadao is a leading expert in Japanese ethnology and in the comparative study of civilizations; the late Murakami Yasusuke was a versatile intellectual known as an economic theoretician, a critical Japanologist, and a pioneer of the interdisciplinary approach in social sciences; Shimazono Susumu, one of the leading religious studies scholars in Japan today, has broadened his field of expertise from Japanese new religious movements to take in global religious phenomena in the modern era.

As I have outlined in this paper, Umesao's "hypothesis of phasic correspondence," Murakami's theory of the origin and development of historic religions, and Shimazono's new model of religions of salvation, all represent macroperspectives in the field of comparative studies in the history of religions. In presenting their approaches each of them describe the Japanese religious situation in a distinct manner. Stressing the geographical positioning of Japan at the periphery of a great civilization, Umesao explains the relationship that developed in Japan between a particular form of world religion (Buddhism) and a particular form of ethnic religion (Shinto) as one of syncretism. Within the general context of his view of the development of historic religions, Murakami also makes mention of the importance of geographic relationships between societies belonging to great civilizations and their neighboring societies, noting the influence China exerted over Japan from without. For Shimazono the classification of new religions as representing a new form of religious salvation is first deduced from a study of new religious movements in Japan, and from there he expanded his research to include New Spirituality Movements throughout the world.

The history of Japanese religions has already established itself in international academic circles as a field of research in its own right. The next step is to consider what contributions Japanese scholars can make, from within their own cultural, social, and religious background, to the wider field of comparative studies. The works of Umesao, Murakami, and Shimazono discussed in these pages are, I am convinced, a seedbed of suggestiveness in just this regard.

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