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Religious Change in Modern Japanese Society

Established Religions and Spirituality

This article examines the state of religion in contemporary Japan from the perspective of consumerism and marketization, focusing on the influence spirituality movements have had on the established religious traditions of Buddhism and Shinto as well as traditional practices such as visiting family graves. By introducing statistical data, the article analyzes the popular notion of shifts "away from temples" and "away from shrines" in Japanese society. As a case study, the article discusses Ehara Hiroyuki and his use of media such as television and magazines, which situates his notion of spirituality within a religious marketplace dominated by the fluidity of individual choice. These trends are not alternatives to the religious practices and worldviews of traditional religions, but rather are in continuity with dominant social values such as reverence of ancestors.

KEYWORDS: spirituality—Ehara Hiroyuki—consumerism—media—religious marketplace—*karui shūkyō*

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The 2010s saw increased media exposure for Buddhist priests. The television show *Obōsan baraeti buchakedera* お坊さんバライティぶっちゃけ寺,[1] quite different from an American evangelical talk show focused on conveying sectarian messages, was a variety program where priests from several sects candidly discussed topics such as internal temple conditions. There was also a Buddhist statuary boom among young women. The 2009 exhibition *National Treasure Ashura* at the Tokyo National Museum drew a record of approximately 950,000 visitors. I recall the long, snaking lines in front of the museum. Young women in their twenties and thirties were at the center of this boom in Buddhism and statuary, and these "statuary girls" (*butsuzō joshi* 仏像女子) enthusiastically wrote blogs to convey their appreciation for the statuary. We can see from these examples that cultured appreciation (*kyōyō shugi teki* 教養主義的) of Buddhism among past generations, exemplified by Watsuji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎 (1889–1960) and Kamei Katsuichirō 亀井勝一郎 (1907–1966), has given way to a completely different pop culture "love" for Buddhist statuary.

In contrast to such positive images of Buddhism, the provocative phrase "disappearing temples" (*jiin shōmetsu* 寺院消滅) also has been part of the discourse on contemporary Buddhism (Ukai 2015). As this phrase implies, at current rates of regional population decline some temples will be forced to permanently close their gates due to a lack of local parishioners. Given this reality faced by traditional religions, the growing popularity of Buddhism in the entertainment industry and media does not necessarily imply a revitalization of religion in Japan. Rather, phenomena such as the "power spot" boom, pilgrimages to sacred anime sites, and other forms of domestic tourism are signs of pop culture penetrating—and the tourist industry encroaching—into traditional religious territory. In a general sense, religion is thought of as a cultural product to be consumed. For example, "affection" (*mederu* 愛でる) for Buddhist images is associated with "healing" (*iyashi* 癒し). However, in such cases this "healing" has been divorced from its religious context and is packaged as a product targeted toward particularly stressful lifestyles.

This article is a macro-level analysis of religious change in modern Japanese society, focusing on the traditional religions of Buddhism and Shinto and the new religious trends of spirituality. In particular, based on the current situation

1. This television program was broadcast on TV Asahi affiliates from September 2014 to December 2017.

of traditional religions, I argue from the viewpoints of consumerization and marketization. There are indications that rapid developments in consumer culture and IT have been exercising great influence on the nature of modern religion since the 1990s. For example, David Lyon writes that what makes today's religion different from what came before is "the diffusion of communication and information technologies" and "the decisive shift towards consumer capitalism and consumer lifestyles" (LYON 2000, 138). Bryan Turner claims, in his thesis on the problem of post-secularization, that religion has changed qualitatively "by the twin processes of commercialization and democratization," so "modernity renders religion increasingly compatible with the lifestyles and practices of consumer society" (TURNER 2012, 142). Building on this scholarship, this article considers the role that consumerization and marketization play in contemporary Japanese religions.

As Mike Featherstone puts it, consumerism focuses on the economic value of cultural products and indicates a perception of "market principles of supply, demand, capital accumulation, competition and monopolization which operate within the sphere of lifestyles, cultural goods and commodities" (FEATHERSTONE 2007, 82). This analysis suggests that, due to the globalization of consumption in which commodities and their imagery penetrate every corner of everyday life, religious cultures and lifestyles are important aspects of the market within the reproductive processes of capitalism. In addition to being an economic issue, marketization, as Peter Berger describes, likewise concerns the modern religion. In other words, as the "sacred canopy" that unifies society dissolves, people construct their own identities, choosing from diverse worldviews in the marketplace (BERGER 1967, 142, 212). Elaborating on Berger's thesis, Wade Clark Roof, in his qualitative analysis of Americans belonging to the baby boomer generation, uses the metaphorical expression of a "spiritual marketplace" to describe religion in contemporary American society. According to Roof, America is not monopolized by the sacred symbolism of the single religious tradition of Christianity. Rather, religious products offered by various religious traditions and cultural industries compete and coexist, and religious consumers select their favorite products from this diverse religious marketplace and "blend" them into a personal identity (ROOF 1999, 78).

Roof indicates that a psychological intent or "quest" (*tankyū* 探求) lies behind this market demand, which he refers to as "reflexive spirituality" (ROOF 1999, 9), and acknowledges that "pluralism, relativism, ontological uncertainty" are factors in the background of this intent. Such factors could be said to be characteristic of late modern societies in general, including Japan. The reason for this is, to quote Anthony Giddens, that the "quest" is closely related to the identity reordering process caused by the deepening of the "disembedding" (*datsu umekomi* 脱埋め込み) of modernity. "Disembedding mechanisms intrude into the heart of

self-identity," as they may be seen to induce "existential anxieties" in individuals (Giddens 1991, 59, 148). This "quest" is a mixture of fear, uncertainty, doubt, and hesitation, and one anticipates that this is a process that causes great stress.

In this article, it is not my intention to use the notion of marketization to reduce religion to a commercial exchange. However, the commodification of ideas and practices originating in religious worldviews, such as fortune-telling, talismans, power spots, psychic judgments (*reinō handan* 霊能判断) and so on, are means of reducing the anxieties and stresses felt by individuals in the reordering of their identities. Addressing this problem of consumerism and marketization, I evaluate changes in Buddhism and Shinto by utilizing statistical data related to these organizations. Next, I highlight Ehara Hiroyuki 江原啓之 (b. 1964) as a case study of a new religious trend in spirituality, in particular the relationship between the characteristics of his messages and marketization. Finally, I explore the relationship between changes in Japanese religion from dominant traditional values, focusing on the role of the media in maintaining traditional culture.

Systemic Change and Marketization in Buddhism

This section aims to analyze systemic change in Buddhism, beginning with the custom of ancestral grave visits (*haka mairi* 墓参り), which are often cited as a religiosity unique to Japan. Recent NHK survey data confirms that Japanese people remain enthusiastic about family grave visits today (Nhk Hōsō Bunka Kenkyūjo 2020, 137–138), as over 70% of those surveyed visit family graves. However, I am quite doubtful that this number will remain so high; although young people continue to visit graves, an increasing number of graves are neither visited nor maintained (Kotani 2018, 115–116). Behind this lie large-scale changes in household structures in Japan. The state of those changes can be easily ascertained from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare's summary of its Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions (*Kokumin seikatsu kiso chōsa no gaikyō* 国民生活基礎調査の概況).[2] According to this document, in 1986, 44.8% of households with a family member over sixty-five were three-generation households, but this shrunk considerably to 9.4% in 2019, while people living alone and childless couples grew from 31.3% in 1986 to 61.1%. In 2019, 20.2% of households had unmarried adult children, up from 11.1% in 1986. These numbers suggest that it will be difficult to continue the traditional memorial practices of children holding services for their parents and grandparents. In other words, it shows that the responsibility for funerals must move from the collective household to the individual, and individuals will increasingly have to manage memorials and graves

2. This document is available on the ministry's website at www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/k-tyosa/k-tyosa19/index.html (accessed 4 February 2022).

on their own. Makimura Hisako dubs this the "atomized society" (Makimura 2018, 89), and the increase in unattended graves reflects migrating populations as well as changes in family structure. In other words, behind the rise of grave visits as family gatherings, an "individualization of death" is clearly occurring.

Next, I would like to consider Buddhist temples that have supported traditional memorial services and grave visits through hereditary temple-parishioner relationships. The days when Buddhist temples had a monopoly on funerals and perennial memorial services are coming to an end. A survey was conducted by the Soto Zen sect, which has the largest number of temples of any Japanese Buddhist sect and has actively emphasized ancestral rituals. According to this survey, over the five-year span of 2005 to 2010, just under 40% of temples across the country reported a decrease in parishioners, up to 30% were unchanged, and just over 20% saw an increase, indicating an overall downward trend (Sōtōshū Shūsei Sōgō Chōsa Iinkai 2015, 59–61). However, the decline in parishioners was not universal, being largest in depopulated areas (a decrease of 3.9 households), while urban areas increased (by 2.1 households; Aizawa and Kawamata 2019, 54). Out of the reasons given for the decrease, roughly 80% of temples regardless of location answered "death of hereditary temple members without successors" and "members moving away to distant places," indicating that the disappearance and relocation of member households are the major causes for diminishing hereditary temple-parishioner relationships. Where increases in membership were reported, more than 50% gave the reasons in a survey as "memorial services for the deceased and ancestors" and "because they were searching for a plot for a grave." We can infer from this that some members leave temples behind in depopulated rural areas and join temples in the urban areas that they move to, showing the strength of commitment to conducting memorials and maintaining graves as reasons for associating oneself with Buddhism. Regarding funeral rites for traditional temple members, a "decline throughout the country" is predicted to occur after 2020 with some regional variations. Rather than seeing growth in hereditary membership through funerals for non-members, funerals for members will be in steep decline, and "preexisting relations with members will be reduced" (Aizawa and Kawamata 2019, 127).

In this way, changes in family structure have sparked changes in hereditary temple-parishioner relationships, in ancestral rites embedded in established religious systems, and in the individualization of death rites. This has led to an increase in religious consumers, those who select a gravestone or funeral rites from a marketplace. Of course, alongside changes in family structure and temple-parishioner relationships, market activity has occurred through the aging of Japanese society. A growing number of people express a desire to choose their own means of death, without being looked after or becoming a burden to one's family as they grow old and die. Responding to the needs of these

consumers, starting around 2010 several magazines and books were published about gravesites and funeral rites in which we can see the rapid progress of marketization. These publications offer a diversity of choices, from "family funerals" (*kazoku sō* 家族葬) to "natural funerals" (*shizen sō* 自然葬), and give detailed prices for various funeral rites. Such materials show us the circumstances surrounding the marketization of funeral rites and allow us to observe how consumers consciously make informed choices when offered from a variety of products (Tsukada and Ōmi 2011, 296–303).

With the ongoing marketization of funeral rites, suppliers with no links to established temples are entering the market. One such case is the supermarket chain AEON and their "priest introduction service." This service creates contracts with monks who perform rituals such as the reading of sutras without a connection to any hereditary temple-parishioner relationship. The most notable feature of this service is that fees for services such as sutra-chanting and types of posthumous names are clearly specified in advance, and individuals are not required to pay any costs beyond the plan that they have selected. Another venture company listed their priest introduction service on Amazon's website, coordinating the dispatch of monks registered with their company to funerals for low prices. In response to this service, the Japan Buddhist Federation (Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai 全日本仏教会), representing the major sects of traditional Buddhist organizations, formally protested on the grounds that "making an offering to a priest in exchange for funeral rites is not a commercial act," causing the service to be temporarily halted. However, after the company made some concessions, such as amending their choice of language, the business resumed. The federations' anxiety can be traced to the fact that in a funeral market marked by the reduction in traditional hereditary temple-parishioner relationships, Buddhist temples' monopoly on funeral services has collapsed, and they have come into competition with other industries. Of course, not all traditional Buddhists are standing athwart the development of marketization and yelling stop. At some temples, there is an awareness of marketization and an effort to uncover consumer preferences in order to develop and provide products unique to the temple that meet these needs. For example, Jōdo Shinshū's Tsukiji Honganji 築地本願寺 has made use of the slogan "open temple" (*hirakaredera* 開かれ寺) and actively placed itself into the market by erecting a café on temple grounds, growing points of contact with the general public, and setting up a counseling office in a well-located Ginza commercial building (Yasunaga 2020, 56–92).

Change and Survival Strategies for Shrine Shinto

Apropos these changes in traditional Buddhism, what sort of things are happening at shrines? From an organizational lens, while the decline of shrines in

depopulated regions is a growing crisis, there is also a progressive economic polarization between shrines in depopulated regions and urban areas. Behind this trend lies the dismantling of local communities due to large-scale migration, and the accompanying rapid decrease in parishioners (*ujiko* 氏子) and worshipers (*sūkeisha* 崇敬者) who live near local shrines and assist them. A report from Jinja Honchō concludes that parishioner and worshiper groups are in decline throughout the country, but in depopulated regions about 90% of shrines reported a decrease while the proportion reporting they had "shrunk by up to 50%" was twice that of shrines outside depopulated regions (Ishii 2016, 127–129). The most common reasons for decreased attendance at shrines are population decline and lifestyle changes, with some depopulated regions reporting decreases of up to 90% (Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo 2016, 45–46). Also, a little over 70% of depopulated regions are "in decline," signaling an impending crisis not just of "vanishing temples" but also of "vanishing shrines." The economic disparity is also severe, with over 70% of shrines in depopulated regions having an annual income of under three million yen, while just under 30% of urban shrines take in over ten million yen per year (Jinja Honchō Sōgō Kenkyūjo 2016, 65–67). In everyday life, relationships between individuals and shrines are becoming weaker. According to Ishii Kenji, in 1996 awareness of the neighborhood *ujigami* 氏神 (guardian deity) worshiped in residential areas was about 70%, but a decade later this had dropped to just over 60%. Frequency of shrine visits was also affected, with the percentage of people who "did not visit" their *ujigami* shrine (including those who did not know where it was) at just over 50%, about 10% less than ten years before. Ownership of household kami altars (*kamidana* 神棚) decreased rapidly compared to ownership of Buddhist altars. In 1996, roughly half of all households had a kami altar, but by 2009 this had shrunk by up to 10% (Ishii 2010a). Regardless of the numbers used, shrines are disappearing from the everyday lives of Japanese people. However, Ishii asserts that this does not indicate an "active rejection or bad opinion" of shrines or Shinto, but more simply just "not knowing about shrines" (Ishii 2005, 145).

In contrast to trends in rural areas, urban shrines, especially famous shrines, have seen a growth in the number of people coming to visit. In particular, visitors are coming to shrines for life-cycle related rituals and annual events commonly associated with the shrines such as the first visit of the new year (*hatsumōde* 初詣), taking newborns to the shrine (*hatsu miyamairi* 初宮参り), visits by children ages seven, five, and three (*shichi go san* 七五三), and averting unlucky months and years (*yaku yoke* 厄除け). For example, rites of passage including the shrine visits of newborns are conducted more frequently in urban than rural areas and are more common now than they were in past generations. Rather than younger generations possessing deep faith in the kami, this rejuvenation of

ritual is said to arise from a commercialization of pregnancy and childbirth in the media (Taguchi 2010, 35–36).

According to Taguchi Yūko's study of newborn visits to shrines in Tokyo, most mothers report that they get their information about the shrines not from their parents but from books and magazines. Thus, rather than being a traditional practice handed down from mothers to children, it amounts to a product marketed to young mothers, and mothers are expected to visit shrines in full accordance with the behavioral model of "mothers' *miyamairi*" created by the media. Moreover, Taguchi finds significant changes in the traditional meaning of these shrine visits. Namely, traditional concepts such as an "awareness of *ujigami*," "ritual participation as *ujiko*," "dispelling pollution of childbirth," and "conferment of spirit" (*reikon no juyo* 霊魂の授与) have transformed into new ideals such as "a break for new mothers to return to normal life after giving birth," "an opportunity to acknowledge kami that protect a child's future," or "a place where three generations can come together to affirm the creation of a new household" (Taguchi 2010, 49). This data shows that the previous function of such rituals, which was to form a sense of social identity through joining into a new community, has been replaced with the affirmation of the lifestyle of the individual as well as to reinforce a sense of family unity.

Some shrines have aimed to grow their visitor base by designing religious merchandise, such as romance-centric good luck charms and fortune-telling targeting young women. For example, on the homepage of Tokyo Daijingū 大神宮, which is called a "love power spot," pastel talismans such as a "flower charm" and "four-season charm" join the traditional group of good-luck charms for traffic safety, success in school exams, dispelling evil, and so on. One can also browse through a list of over fifty types of charms including the romance-oriented "happy love charm" (*shiawase koi* 幸せ恋) and "lucky key for success in romance" (*renai jōju shiawase kagi* 恋愛成就幸せ鍵), the marriage-oriented "marriage lily charm" (*enmusubi suzuran* 縁結び鈴蘭) and "mallet of marital happiness" (*enmusubi shiawase kozuchi* 縁結び幸せ小槌), and magical crystals such as the "agate charm" (*menou* メノウ) and "pebble charm" (*koishi* こいし).[3] Collecting calligraphic visitors' stamps (*goshuin* 御朱印) is also popular, and many websites list topics such as "Tokyo's Ten Biggest Shrines for Stamps."[4] Moreover, some shrines make proactive use of popular anime. Kanda Myōjin 神田明神 sells various stamp books featuring popular anime such as *Love Live*, *Is the Order a Rabbit?*, and *Magical Girl Madoka Magica*. Also, as with Washinomiya Jinja's 鷲宮神社 link to the anime *Lucky Star*, shrines resembling anime backdrops have become

3. For a list of the charms sold at Tokyo Daijingū, see www.tokyodaijingu.or.jp/ofuda_omamori (accessed 4 February 2022).

4. See, for example, www.travel.co.jp/guide/matome/3347 (accessed 4 February 2022).

the object of so-called "sacred pilgrimages" (*seichi junrei* 聖地巡礼), resulting in a sudden inundation of visitors.

Coinciding with these recent developments in urban centers, shrines are catering to the power spot boom to increase their number of visitors. Not all shrines are power spots, but some shrines themselves aim to attract visitors by dubbing themselves the "greatest power spot," making the phrase one of the pillars of market competition among modern shrines. Ehara Hiroyuki has played a major role in directing this power spot boom towards shrine visits. Ehara redefines traditional shrines as "spiritual sanctuaries," presenting them as new religious spaces (Ehara 2010, 18). Ehara's rebranding efforts aside, traditional shrines are by definition "sanctuaries," but by reinterpreting them with the trendy and English term "sanctuary" he makes them seem modern and appealing. As Suga Naoko suggests, through the efforts of Ehara "the circulation of the 'shrines are power spots' discourse leads to the possibility that shrines may be conceived of as power spots" (Suga 2010, 252). It may be that the media are largely responsible for the paradox of shrines becoming popular as power spots even as attendance at shrines for everyday activities declines.

The Spirituality of Ehara Hiroyuki

The concept of spirituality came into usage in the West beginning in the 1990s as a general term for people seeking to define their own lives through various religious concepts and practices. Phrases such as "spiritual but not religious" were employed to distance oneself from organized religion. Spirituality, as such terminology implies, is not supported by any particular organization but rather makes fluid and eclectic use of a diversity of religious worldviews and practices. Thus, it might be more appropriate to refer to it as "a new form of consumerist 'culture'" rather than a single movement (Shimazono 2012, 22). However, common features include an emphasis on internal subjective life over external religious authority, and a holistic thinking that unifies body, mind, and spirit (Woodhead 2010, 38). Furthermore, according to Linda Mercadante, who surveyed people who identify with this notion of spirituality, most are critical of the theology and views of Western Christianity (Mercadante 2014, 71).

In Japan, active discussion of spirituality began in the early part of the first decade of the twenty-first century, initially centered around the three fields of transpersonal psychology, spiritual care, and the sociology of religion (Horie 2019, 30). However, all of these approaches are rather academic, and trying to find a specific subject of study that embodied the spirituality of ordinary people was a challenge. From New Age practices like yoga or meditation to fortune-telling, power spots, and feng shui, the term encompasses many different things. I focus on Ehara Hiroyuki because his immense popularity through the 2010s was

supported by his use of media and the methods of transmitting his messages. Furthermore, Ehara is largely responsible for how we have come to use the loan word "spiritual" in contemporary Japan.

Based on autobiographical statements in his writings, Ehara Hiroyuki has followed a similar trajectory in life to traditional psychics in Japan (Ehara 2020b, 154–185). From a young age, he was gifted with a "spiritual sense" allowing him to see spirits and auras, and at the age of eighteen he began to suffer from repeated paranormal events. Determined to find the cause, he visited various psychic mediums, and through interaction with the female psychics he met on his wanderings he learned that his guardian spirit was an ascetic from the Warring States period named Masakiyo no mikoto 昌清之命. In this way, the supernatural experience of being guided by a spirit informed Ehara's life and thought, which is often the case with Japanese mediums. The circumstances of his biography are not, by themselves, particularly novel. However, what is unique about Ehara's case is his idea of "the progress of the spirit" (*tamashii no seichō* 魂の成長) that originates in spiritualism, and he interpreted the messages that he received from the spirit world as counseling to assist in this progress. According to Ehara, he began calling himself a "spiritual counselor" (*supirichuaru kaunserā* スピリチュアルカウンセラー) under the influence of a medium in London and claimed that his counseling offers a "life map" (*jinsei no chizu* 人生の地図) by resolving various "traumas" (*torauma* トラウマ) that hinder the growth of individual spirits. For Ehara, the word "spiritual" denotes advice tailored to each stage of the spirit's progress (Ehara 2020a, 55).

Ehara's fame and popularity have primarily been due to his use of media. His message is communicated through books, magazines, and television, rather than from within a specific religious institution. His audience is not limited to members of any specific organization but consists of ordinary people who happen to stumble across his work in magazines or his appearances on television. His power spot investigations, fortune-telling, and life advice, which appear in magazines for trend-seeking readers such as *An-An* or *Hanako WEST*, deliver his messages to readers in an easily consumable format. His skillful use of English loan words such as "spiritual counselor" and "sanctuary" distinguish his presentation of religious topics from traditional methods of explanation. For example, he describes good luck charms (*omamori* お守), fortunes (*omikuji* おみくじ), and inscribed sticks burnt in fire rituals (*gomagi* 護摩木) using the English loan words "spiritual supplements" (*supirichuaruna sapurimento* スピリチュアルなサプリメント) and explains that their power is "not a medicine with immediate results but takes effect bit by bit" (Ehara 2010, 68). Rather than preaching the power of religion through difficult doctrinal terms, he builds on readers' everyday interest in health using the word "supplement." His choice of topics takes the format of addressing little sources of worry or stress his readers encounter in everyday life,

and offering hints on how to resolve them. For example, he covers sources of anxiety that everyone feels from time to time, such as "do you have a pessimistic attitude?" or "is there some important thing you keep putting off?" (Ehara 2020a, 34–46, 124–137). Furthermore, his work overflows with optimism, promising a resolution to the problems on one's mind, a device providing comfort to readers. Of course, Ehara's advice comes from the viewpoint of a spirit medium. But, rather than language that evokes religious imagery such as "spiritual abilities" (*reiteki nōryoku* 霊的能力), his presentation method uses the vocabulary of "mysterious power" (*shinpi no chikara* 神秘の力) and he emphasizes the importance of "noticing" (*kizuku* 気づく) this power. For Ehara, religion is nothing out of the ordinary but is represented as continuous with the everyday world and as easily accessible to those who look for it. In this way, Ehara's spirituality is characterized by the blending of traditional spirit beliefs, such as clairvoyance and guardian spirits, with counseling and entertainment elements. This combination of traditional terminology and consumerism makes his product seem like a more casual form of "healing" (*iyashi* 癒し).

Media and the Dominant Traditional Culture

From the therapeutic messages used in Ehara's media mix to the diversification of funeral rites and growing interest in low-cost alternatives, and from the sale of various types of good luck charms to meet people's needs to the strengthening appeal of power spots, we see that people increasingly act as consumers in a marketplace of religious products. However, the competition between diverse worldviews, which Wade Clark Roof expresses as a "spiritual marketplace" (Roof 1999, 79), differs from an individualist approach that consists of sampling various religious phenomena in search of one's own identity. Rather, the values that underpin market choices are derived from preexisting religious practices such as memorials for the dead, popular spirit worship, and this-worldly prayers for matchmaking or good luck, and one would be hard-pressed to find anything new among these practices. Thus, traditional values, which one would have expected to have been adapted to society in late modern Japan, in fact continue to maintain a significant presence. The clearest expression of this phenomenon is Ehara's spirituality. In Western spirituality, there exists a critique of established religion, and as an alternative to it a reflexive reordering of identity by adopting Eastern and other religious traditions. In other words, in Roof's wording, there is an intentionally "reflexive spirituality" (Roof 1999, 9). However, Ehara's spirituality lacks any criticism of traditional religions but rather complements the traditional religious worldview. In this respect, instead of providing a space for shifting individual identities against a background of diversification, as in the United States, the marketization and personalization of religion in Japan appears

to be closely linked to reaffirming traditional values by purchasing religious products that serve to further popularize existing traditional religions.

However, while the dominant religious traditions maintain their influence, the actual locations for practice—Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines—do not. In other words, while the dominant religious traditions appear to be going strong, the temples and shrines that theoretically support them are becoming hollowed out. How can we explain this contradiction? How do the traditional religious traditions maintain dominance as a frame of reference for identity formation despite their dislocation?

Socialization through home and school education and participation in annual events and rites of passage play important roles in the transmission and inheritance of traditional values. However, it has become clear that the incidence of possession and frequency of worship at home Buddhist altars and *kamidana*, which functioned as instruments for religious socialization in the home environment, is steadily decreasing. Also, due to the postwar legal principle of religious freedom, there are few opportunities to learn about religion in elementary and secondary public schools, and some students cannot even distinguish between temples and shrines. Furthermore, the annual events and rites of passage mediated by traditional religions are becoming grounded in individual identity and losing their socially imposed restraints. This reflects a diversification in people's organizational affiliations and lifestyles and shows that the focus of rituals is shifting from social collectives to families and individuals. The weakening of collective, social restraints has created new meanings of traditional practices, as in the case of shrine visits (Ishii 2005, 204–207). Therefore, separated from the traditional values that once underpinned them and were transmitted through them, these rituals are transforming into opportunities to meet family and friends (Ishii 2005, 211).

So what allows for the maintenance and reproduction of traditional values? This is not an easy question to answer, but I feel that here, too, we must emphasize the influence of media. I would like to make use of two studies in order to think about the importance of media influence. First, Toishiba Shiho explains that the books about "ancestral rites and visiting graves" that she researched are not mere recommendations to conduct rites or visit graves but offer knowledge about how conducting rites and visiting graves can lead to happiness and fortune (Toishiba 2020, 87–106). Looking at the contents of fifty-three books on "ancestral rites and visiting graves" published during the 2010s, she notes that they portray ancestral rites and visiting graves as holding the secret to obtaining this-worldly benefits such as fortunate marriage (*ryōen* 良縁), being blessed with children (*ko dakara* 子宝), financial luck (*kinun* 金運), safe childbirth (*shū seun* 出世運), and some of them assert that graves are power spots in their own right. These books express an extremely simple worldview that all people are by

nature happy, and suggest that ancestors seek the happiness and prosperity of their descendants and protect them as guardian spirits. About half of the books explain that neglecting to hold ancestral rites or visit graves was traditionally believed to be a cause of natural disasters. Furthermore, the authors of these books acquired their "teachings" through sources such as "traditional divination," "ascetic practice" (*shugyō* 修行), or "experiential data" (*keikenteki dēta* 経験的データ), and many say they are offering "ancient Japanese moral and religious practices."[5] According to Toishiba, when reading these kinds of books, readers tend to pick and choose only the parts that are easy for them to understand, so it is more persuasive to offer practices that do not make them feel uncomfortable, such as visiting graves (Toishiba 2020, 104). In the context of this-worldly benefits, such as good luck and being blessed with children, having a separate existence from the realm of religious systems, Toishiba's research underscores the importance of mass publications that explain the value of these practices as one reason why the traditional values of ancestral rites and visiting graves are able to maintain influence despite the slump in affiliation with Buddhist temples.

Second, through an analysis of religion-related television programming, Ishii Kenji examines the construction of stereotypes about religion. Sorting religion-related programming into the categories of "specific sects," "culture," "news reports," and "variety shows," Ishii focuses on religion-related information broadcast on news programs over the course of a year, looking at what sort of topics were broadcast and for what length of time. According to his survey of "shrines and Shinto," the majority of programs discussed either links to politics or rites of passage and annual events such as *hatsumōde*, *setsubun*, *shichi go san*, and weddings, while programs on temples and Buddhism focused on rites of passage and annual events such as ancestral grave visits during Obon as well as cultural assets such as Buddhist statuary and temple architecture (Ishii 2010b, 183). Based on these findings, Ishii concludes that television serves to "revive the events of traditional religion" vanishing from the everyday lives of Japanese people and to "awaken and maintain a connection to traditional religiosity and interest in traditional culture" (Ishii 2010b, 173). That is to say, the rites of passage and annual events at shrines and temples shown on television reinforce the image of an unchanging religious tradition, resulting in a reaffirmation of traditional values.

These stereotypes are not only determined by television programs about religion. Entertainment shows that are not about religion also directly influence the image of religion for young people who lack an everyday connection

5. Toishiba provides a list of authors, titles, and publishers of the 53 books she has examined in her research. Among these authors are Ehara and Hosoki Kazuko 細木数子 (1938–2021), who Toishiba also considers to be a representative author of this type of book on visiting graves and discusses Hosoki's ideas in some detail (Toishiba 2020, 94–95, 98–99, 100–103).

to religion. For example, L. Schofield Clark reveals that in the U.S., entertainment such as television and film is a cultural resource for understanding the religion and spirituality of young people who do not consider themselves religious (Clark 2007, 70–71). In Japan, anime in particular makes frequent use of depictions of traditional religion. For example, Shinkai Makoto's 新海 誠 film *Kimi no na wa* 君の名は, said to have outstripped Miyazaki Hayao's 宮崎 駿 films in popularity, is full of depictions and representations of shrines. This popular anime, which was released in 2016, earned twenty-five billion yen at the box office and garnered various film awards both domestically and internationally. The theme of the story is a body-swap romance between a male and female high school student, but, at the same time, extraordinary events such as a meteorite impact and time travel develop at a rapid pace. One of the protagonists, Miyamizu Mitsuha 宮水三葉, is a high school student living in the mountains of the Hida Takayama 飛騨高山 region. She serves the traditional Miyamizu Shrine as a miko 巫女 (shrine maiden) where her grandmother is the head priestess. The shrine's object of worship is inside a crater on the outskirts of town, and when Mitsuha offers "chewed saké" (*kuchi kami saké* 口噛み酒) before the object of worship, a meteorite falls from the sky. The other protagonist, Tachibana Taki 立花 瀧, who visits the town out of concern for Mitsuha, falls through time into this crater, which then plays a pivotal role in the story. Of course, Miyamizu Shrine and the crater do not actually exist. However, amusingly enough, some young people go on sacred pilgrimages to pinpoint the location of this Miyamizu Shrine, and, for a time, shrines based in Hida Takayama were visited by many such "pilgrims."[6] They were not visiting the shrines with pious intent and were not finding any new meanings in the shrines. Such behavior has no meaning beyond what has been given to it in the pop culture context of anime pilgrimages. However, this does not mean that "pilgrims" deny the religiosity of shrines, and when they visit the real-world shrines they pay their respects and purchase good luck charms according to traditional etiquette. Therefore, shrine visits in the form of anime pilgrimages likewise fulfill the function of affirming the worldview and practices of the traditional religion of Shinto.

Conclusion

This article has examined changes in contemporary Japanese religion today from the perspective of consumerism and marketization. Structural social developments such as urbanization, demographic aging, shifts in family structure, and the rise of consumerist capitalism have weakened the institutional foundations of the traditional religions of Buddhism and Shinto. Grounded in local commu-

6. See the following website for information about the pilgrimage: https://kaiun.website/archives/1522 (accessed 17 February 2022).

nities, the influence of these traditional institutions has waned as ties from local communities are lost and people gradually transform into religious consumers, choosing from a marketplace funerals and graves to fit their lifestyle. Although traditional rites of passage such as shrine visits and visits by children ages seven, five, and three continue, they are slowly losing their religious character and are now used as an opportunity for family events such as commemorative photos and celebratory meals.

From an institutional perspective, people are steadily moving away from temples and shrines. However, this does not imply a total separation from religion, that is, secularization. As a consequence of the marketization of religion, a "light religion" (*karui shūkyō* 軽い宗教) targeting the consumer lifestyle that has become culturally dominant since the first decade of the twenty-first century continues to flourish. The popularity of "light religion" has spread through online media and books, such as the bestselling writings of Ehara Hiroyuki and various publications on grave visits and ancestral rites.

While this "light religion" is independent of established religious institutions, the worldview and values in which it is grounded reveal a close continuity with the ideas and practices of traditional religion such as ancestral rites, grave visits, and this-worldly prayers. As a result, it functions as a supplement to traditional religion. In that sense, religious change in modern Japan differs on the point of the diversification of worldviews from the "qualitative shift from unquestioned belief to a more open, questing mood," which Roof calls "reflexive spirituality" (Roof 1999, 9). However, if we consider how participation in "light religion" reorders religious identity, it is quite possible that this quest ends in reaffirmation of a traditional worldview. In fact, just as Roof also offers the categories of "born again" and "fundamentalists" as types of "quests" (Roof 1999, 24–29), it is possible that such changes force traditional institutions to offer a more comprehensive worldview.

In contemporary Japan the many "spiritualities" that have emerged to replace the declining traditional religious institutions are simply atomized traditional values floating in a media space, and people gain temporary psychological stability by latching on to them when needed. Being ad hoc and temporary, these spiritualities fail to provide a sustained religious identity. However, it is their continuity with traditional values that allows such inconsistency and ensures flexibility and freedom. It is, so to speak, a consumption of worldviews, a marketization that reflects a desire for consumable religion. Keeping in mind that Ehara Hiroyuki, comparing life to a journey, stresses the necessity of "a 'life map' that tells us how we were born and how we ought to live" (Ehara 2020b, 84–85), Ehara's 2010s spirituality boom can be seen as an increase in the consumption of worldviews.

[Translated by Avery Morrow]

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