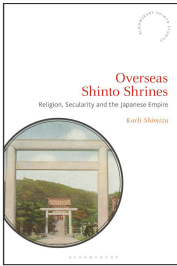


REVIEWS



Karli Shimizu, *Overseas Shinto Shrines: Religion, Secularity and the Japanese Empire*

Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 296 pages. Hardback, £90.00. ISBN: 9781350234994. Paperback, £28.99. ISBN: 9781350234987.

KARLI SHIMIZU'S BOOK *Overseas Shinto Shrines: Religion, Secularity and the Japanese Empire* is the first English-language monograph on the Shinto shrines established outside of Japan between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. In the introduction (chapter 1), Shimizu outlines her aim to “explore how Shinto shrines were both secularized and religionized, as well as how this process affected their position within society.” By considering the ideology of imperialism and colonialism and their “secular” dimension as the socio-cultural backdrop against which overseas Shinto shrines were established, the author seeks to “demonstrate that secularism can be just as oppressive as a state religion” (27).

Shimizu joins a growing group of religion scholars who question the use of the category of religion in the Japanese context. As Shimizu argues, “The modern concepts of religion and the secular are not self-evident categories, but are rooted in a specific genealogy that can be traced back to early modern Europe and the development of the nation-state” (26). Hence, Shimizu considers the equally contested category of secularism or secularity as another concept in need of scrutiny and further research, “Doing this allows us to examine shrines’ role in promoting the state’s attempt at embedding a new, modern consensus of reality—a Japanese secularity” (27). Note that Shimizu does not ignore the equally religious elements of the overseas shrines. On the contrary, by focusing on secularity Shimizu skillfully allows for an analytical comparison between the religious and secular elements of Japanese nation-building, invigorating her study

with an innovative dimension that contributes to an ever-growing discussion regarding the conceptualization of Shinto during the Meiji period and beyond.

The introduction is followed by six chapters of varying length and scope, which take the reader on a historical and geographical journey, case study by case study, outlining Shimizu's approach to overseas Shinto shrines as a project of secularism. Chapter 2, the first case study, focuses on the secular formation of Shinto shrines on the home islands of Japan, focusing on how different shrines became crucial agents in the Japanese government's move towards secularity. Chapter 3 moves to the first of Meiji Japan's colonies, Hokkaido, and the adoption of "pioneer theology," the enshrinement of land deities into imperial shrines and the Shintoization of the war dead. In chapter 4, the author discusses moves to Taiwan as the first formal Japanese colony and the establishment of shrines as part of the imperial assimilation of Taiwanese into Japanese subjects. In chapter 5, the author highlights Korea and the formulation of "universalized theology," the spiritual transformation of people, and the adjacent introduction of a hierarchical view of different religions. In chapter 6, Shimizu seeks to demonstrate the ideological gaps between Japanese settlers and the colonized and their relationship to the overseas shrines. And finally, chapter 7 is a study of the shrines built on the islands of Hawai'i, where two secularities—Japanese secularism and American secularism—clashed, and how these shrines differed from the ones found on the home islands.

Shimizu's monograph is learned, detailed, and dense, and due to the broad range of sources and shrines that are examined, it is difficult to run through the chapters in detail. In brief, the main theme throughout Shimizu's investigation is the use of secularity when it comes to establishing different shrines within and beyond the Japanese home islands. As written in the concluding eighth chapter, "The Shinto shrines in this book were part of Japan's project of modernization. By adapting the Western political system of secularism, Japan was able to formulate its own Japanese secularity built upon a foundation of modern science and Shinto myths" (227). Accordingly, Shimizu points out that the Japanese system of secularism and its application to its colonial shrine activity is not unique to Japan, and there is a wide window for similar studies of other forms of secularism, because "the secularisms that birthed other states are also 'grand myths' that deserve to be examined more closely" (228).

Although Shimizu's theoretical and conceptual framework is of great interest for any further study of secularism, as a collection of case studies on the subject, I would have enjoyed more non-Japanese examples of secularism other than a comparison with American secularism. Examples from other nineteenth-century nation-states with prominent secularist movements at the time, such as Great Britain and Germany, would have further supported the author's claims. For example, more information on how parallel movements might have possibly

influenced the Japanese government's actions and vice versa would have been interesting.

Similarly, more detailed explanations and examples of the different “theologies” at play during the Japanese occupation of Taiwan and Korea and how these might have influenced concurrent as well as current religious traditions might have illuminated and accentuated the thesis of secularism as a main driving force for the Japanese colonial project. However, these calls for more examples and comparison might be beyond the scope of an already quite extensive study, and if anything, they illustrate the need for further research into the “grand myths” of secularism.

In conclusion, by collecting and discussing material from multiple sources and geographical constellations, Shimizu's brilliant book has paved the way for further studies not only in the study of religion but likewise in other places where the category of secularity clashes with the category of religion. Thus, this book is essential reading for any student of Japanese religion in general and Shinto in particular.

Martin van der Linden
Linnaeus University