

Editors' Introduction

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Two years ago, Professor Akaike Noriaki of Aichi Gakuin University and Professor Jan Swyngedouw of Nanzan University began a study group on the sociology of religion and religious studies in the Tōkai (Nagoya) region of Japan. The group has since been very active and held regular meetings with research communications by its members, most of them focused upon the study of modern and contemporary religion, and upon theoretical issues in the sociological study of religion.

The editors and contributors to the present volume of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* are all members of this study group, and its contents reflects, if not completely, at least to a great extent, the communications and discussions held at their study meetings. The theme was decided upon by the editors, and an appeal was made to the members to contribute along that line. Seven papers were chosen from among those submitted and translated into English. The result is this special issue.

We dare say that this volume on folk religion gives a fair image of present interests and trends in the study of religion in Japan with regard to this topic, the more so since the study of folk religion is increasingly recognized as an important genre in research on religion. The great number of scholarly books and articles published on this theme in the last decade attests to this fact (see Gorai 1979-1980, Sakurai 1982, Namihira 1984, Tamamuro 1987). The main theme of discussion at the 1987 Summer Seminar Tokyo-based Study Group on the Sociology of Religion, which was started in 1975 and consists of younger scholars, was folk religion. For those engaged in field research on modern and contemporary religion, the daily life of people and the social norms and world view sustaining their life are important items of investigation. As a matter of course, folk religion,

i.e., the beliefs of people in their daily life, is to be entered into the perspective of such study (see Miyake 1974).

Minkan Shinkō and Minzonku Shūkyō

It is only in the last decade that the term *minzoku shūkyō* 民俗宗教 (lit., “folk religion”) has come into general use. Before, it was rather customary to use the term *minkan shinkō* 民間信仰 (“popular faith”) to designate the ordinary faith of the common people and the popular religious movements that stemmed from it. We will first have a look, then, at the problem of why the former term has increasingly gained acceptance, and at the possibility of using the term *minzoku shūkyō* in scholarly research (Tajima 1987).

Both the Japanese terms *minkan shinkō* and now *minzoku shūkyō* are translations of the English term “folk religion.” Both of these terms are thought to be appropriate for expressing what is meant by the English term. However, for the scholars using those terms, the angle of interest in religious studies has greatly changed in recent years. Let us start with a look at how proponents of *minkan shinkō* theory like Hori Ichirō and Sakurai Tokutarō define and explain “folk religion” (Hori 1951, Sakurai 1966).

1. The area at the opposite pole of established religion, with a lack of founder, doctrine, and organization, and
2. faith, customs, and folk beliefs held in rural villages and connected with daily occupations; as modernization and urbanization proceed, popular faith loses its meaning and is doomed to disappear.

First, as far as 1) is concerned, it can be accepted as a theoretical explanation. However, typical established religions such as Christianity and Buddhism have also taken root in local societies through the medium of annual observances and rites of passage. Therefore, to make a special distinction between popular faith and established religion with an inbuilt tendency to attribute a greater religious value to the latter does not correspond to reality. This insight is a new one. It is derived from studies done on religion in local societies by sociologists, folklorists, and anthropologists. That the discipline of Buddhist folklore studies has gained currency indicates that in reality, e.g. in the case of Buddhism in Japan, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between Buddhism as an “established religion” and as folk religion. Also, the study of new religions, which has flourished in recent years, teaches us that the distinction between popular faith and established religion is far from clear. It has indicated, for example, how not a few of those new religions have greatly adopted elements from popular faith while possessing doctrines and organization. Judging

from the empirical research done on these and other phenomena we might say that the explanation based on the view expressed in 1) is gradually losing its conviction.

Secondly, many students of folklore have considered it to be their proper mission to record and collect without delay all available data on the waning folk faith, since based upon the opinion expressed in 2) they see it gradually disappearing under the continuing waves of modernization and urbanization. However, an academic study which has as its only object the popular faith of the rural population at a time when the number of people engaged in primary industries is decreasing and the concentration of people in the big cities is proceeding, with the majority already living there, can only produce results describing a situation far removed from the real life of present-day Japanese. In recent years, however, voices have been raised to establish the field of city folklore studies, and research is increasingly being done on, for example, city festivals and their cosmology, attesting to the fact that the object of folklore studies is in for a great change. It might be true that the waves of modernization and urbanization have a negative effect on the popular faith of people living in rural areas. But it is equally true that in the cities things close to popular faith are absorbing the religious needs of the populace. The new religions in urban society, the study of which has become one of the main preoccupations of sociologists, folklorists, and students of religion, might be the most typical examples (Inoue 1981). It is said that shamans, who are gradually disappearing in the rural areas, are at present active in the cities in great numbers.

Thirdly, *minkan shinkō* has long been a theme for research by folklorists, while *minzoku shūkyō* has been a theme studied from the interdisciplinary approaches of scholars of religion, sociologists, and anthropologists. As the interdisciplinary cooperation increased among those in the humanities and social sciences, *minzoku shūkyō* became a term which was easier to use and more widely accepted among scholars.

Finally, the term *minkan shinkō* sometimes gives the impression of a faith narrowly confined to a specific local area (in many cases villages). However, in contemporary society with its population mobility, development of information services, and standardization of life patterns, cultural phenomena peculiar to only one specific area can hardly be preserved or established. As scholars of popular faiths try to collect data on a nation-wide scale, it becomes increasingly difficult to define them as folk events peculiar to a specific region. Moreover, the more we acquire data about similar phenomena in neighboring countries, the more it becomes impossible to define them as typically Japanese. For example, many of the theories about

Japan's peculiar faith can no longer be maintained, and we feel a growing need for comparative folklore studies. As a result, our interest in the comparative study of popular faith is also on the rise (see Suzuki 1972, Araki 1985, Watanabe 1985).

The points mentioned above describe the background of the recent period in which the term *minzoku shūkyō* has been gradually gaining wider acceptance in academic circles in Japan as a term which includes the religious activities and practices of people in general. It is difficult to establish a clear definition of *minzoku shūkyō*, but we can offer the following features.

1. Religion which is observed by people in general. This "folk religion" does not include the theological knowledge of religious specialists or the religious theories of philosophers. It refers to religious activities which are a response to the concrete daily needs of people in general.
2. The potential to a certain extent for doctrine and organization, due to contact with or under the influence of an established ("universal") religion, and therefore to serve as a basis for the birth of new religious movements (see Shimazono 1978).
3. Can maintain continuity or see new emergence in modern, urbanized society.
4. "Folk religion" is born in and fostered through daily communal life, in which ritualistic communication is valued (see Yanagawa 1987).

Outline of Contents

Let us now turn to the individual essays contained in this volume. Four of them deal with folk religion in the Ise-Shima region of Japan. They are not introductions of specific events in that area which cannot be seen in any other place in Japan, but they take up Bon observances and lion performances (*shishi gyōji*) which in fact are held all over the country, and they try to elucidate the meaning of folk religion in relation to the surrounding society. Three of the essays have Bon observances as their theme and are reports on the results of a joint research project that extended over a period of five years (see Akaike 1988).

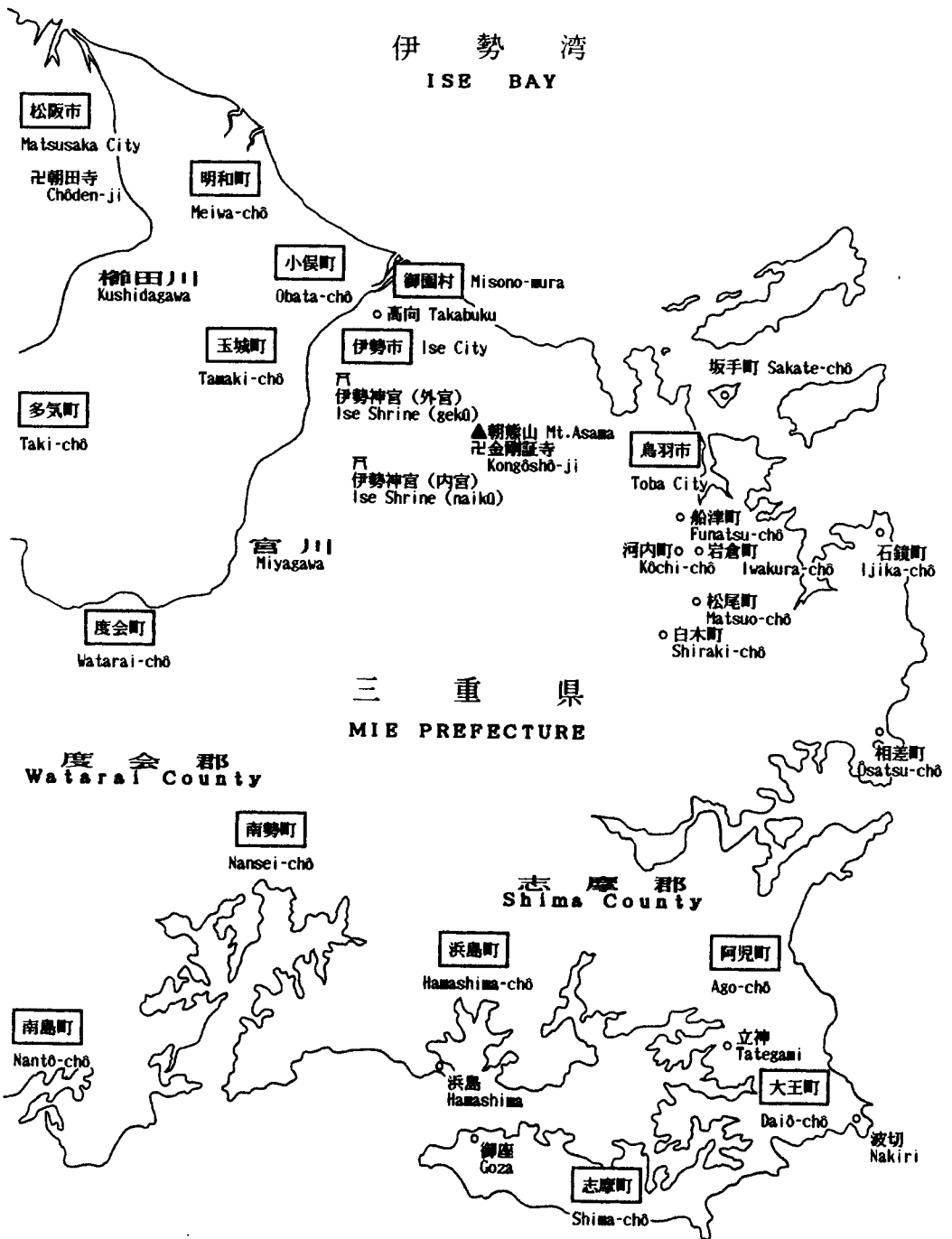
The Ise-Shima region in Mie Prefecture, which is located precisely in the center of the Japanese archipelago, is in the vicinity of the famous Ise Shrines which enshrine the ancestral *kami* of the Imperial family, and is an area which maintains its contact with the cultural and religious traditions of ages past. However, Ise Shrine is not very closely connected with the folk

religion of this local area. An exception is the faith in Mt. Asama which, during the Edo Period (1603–1868), came to be closely associated with the Ise faith of the common people, and became a powerful religious center. The folk religion of the Shima area was also influenced by Shugendo, being in close proximity to the famous Shugendo center of Kumano. At the present time, however, most of the Buddhist temples are affiliated with the Zen schools of Sōtō and Rinzai (Wakamori 1974).

The Ise-Shima region consists of fishing villages along the Pacific coast and of rural villages in the inland section [see Map]. Even nowadays it still possesses many places where the social structure of the old villages has been preserved since the Edo Period and where the traditional village order persists in spite of modern social change. The Bon observances and lion performances discussed in this issue are maintained by age groups and mostly performed by the younger people. In this sense, they also have the character of rites of passage whereby the younger people become full-fledged members of the village.

Bon observances are held all over Japan and have as their purpose *kuyō* 供養 or “memorial rites” for the dead. Rites for the *shinmō* 新亡, or people who died during the year before, are held on an especially large scale. Of course, other spirits besides those of the recently deceased, such as ancestral spirits and spirits without relatives to venerate them, are objects of veneration. The three essays, dealing with the Bon observances and based upon field work in the area, focus upon the meaning of those memorial services for the recently deceased.

The essay by Kimura reports on an investigation of present-day people’s religious activities with regard to Mt. Asama, known as a place for mountain worship where since ages past the dead have been venerated. It analyzes the influence of urbanization on these practices. The main activity, called *takemairi*, also has memorial services for the dead as its purpose. In former times, immediately after the funeral, the male members of the family performed the *takemairi* custom, while the women called a *miko* (“medium”) and received some oracles. Recently, however, this latter custom has declined. The *takemairi*, on the other hand, is very much flourishing. On the top of Mt. Asama, *tōba* (“memorial slats”) are set up for the deceased and decorated with articles left behind and cherished by the deceased. As indicated in the essays by Yahata and Kawakami, this custom also contains symbolic actions for soothing the spirits of the *shinmō* who are able to harm people. But the *tōba kuyō* nowadays seems to be primarily a token of private faith whereby the bereaved families express their respect and yearning for the dead. Urbanization has certainly weakened the



solidarity of the local community and brought about the decline of public rituals. On the other hand, as exemplified by the *takemairi* custom, private rituals with the family in the center seem to be on the rise.

In her essay, Kawakami analyses the symbolic meaning of the *shinmō*, based upon field work done in a rural village of the inland region. At the time of the Bon festival, the so-called *hashiramatsu* 柱松 observance is also performed nowadays. In this rite, dressed-up young people ring bells and beat drums, form a *dainenbutsu* procession, and burn big torches for the purpose of pacifying the spirits of the recently deceased. Such observances and performance arts for soothing violent spirits by means of musical instruments, dancing and jumping around, have a long historical tradition and are found all over the country. The *jige* 地下 organization, which is in charge of the Bon festival in Matsuo, consists of three age groups, the old, middle, and younger age groups. The *dainenbutsu* and *hashiramatsu* rites are performed by the younger people under the guidance and supervision of the other groups, so that by well performing their task the young become full-fledged members of the *jige* organization. The Bon festival is, then, simultaneously an initiation rite for the young people in order to become *jige* members, and an initiation also for the spirits of the recently deceased in order to become ancestral spirits. In other words, one can say that the young people of the *jige* are structurally in the same location as the *shinmō* in relation to the world of ancestral spirits. The violent behavior of the young symbolizes the spirits of the recently deceased, and their masquerade and makeup express that they are beings in the state of liminality.

The essay by Yahata reports on a place where memorial services for all the recently deceased of the village are held through the performance of the *dainenbutsu* dances sponsored by village officials, and stresses how for the villagers the order in which the *kuyō* is held is of primary importance. This order is decided upon according to the rank of the funeral and the posthumous name given, and to the degree of the deceased's contribution to the village. Even if for some or another reason the family would have liked to change the rank of the posthumous name, this was often impossible until the Bon festival was over. This means that, in the period between the funeral and the Bon, the spirits of the recently deceased were confined within social regulations. In former times, special performance arts were held at the time of the memorial services for persons who had made great contributions to their community. Nowadays, these are regularly performed by an association for the preservation of those arts, and it is reported that also the order of the *kuyō* is changing towards a system based upon age. In his essay the author states that one can deal with the Bon observances in

terms of social sanctions on the community level.

Sakurai's article examines in detail the process of *shishi gyōji* 獅子行事 ("lion dance"), or *okashira shinji* 御頭神事 in the Ise-Shima area, a common event performed in Japan to celebrate the coming of spring. He attempts to understand the meaning of this ritual from its relationship to the community society. The lion (*shishi*), despite its unusual appearance, is considered a *kami* of the community. *Kami* make their appearance at the borders of the community. The potential misfortunes of the community members are transferred to the *shishi*, and the objects used during the event are discarded at the community borders. This functions to symbolize the removal of potential misfortune from the community, and reinforces the locale and order of the community. Single men of nineteen or twenty years old play a central role in these activities. It is said in this community that "one is not a real man until one dances the *okashira*." The age of nineteen is a liminal time during which one's social consciousness changes, and the *shishimai* event functions as an opportunity for those of this age to become proper members of the community. As in the participation of "liminal" beings such as nineteen year-old young people and *tengu*, the *kami* also must be animal-like beings with an extraordinary or unusual appearance.

This special issue contains, in addition to the above articles on the Ise-Shima area, three studies on various aspects of folk religion in Asia.

First, Iida examines Korean Shamanism among the Korean residents in Japan, venturing into areas relatively unexamined in previous studies of the society and culture of resident Koreans in Japan. A large number of Korean immigrants from Cheju Island have settled in Ikuno-ku, Osaka. The magico-religious activities of these Korean residents, especially women, is centered around the so-called "Korean temples" located in the Ikoma mountain range to the east of Osaka. Iida participated in a general study of folk religion in the Ikoma area during the 1980s, focusing on the Korean temples. In the present article he presents the results of this research, explaining the structure and process of rituals conducted by Korean shamans in Japan and their concept of spirits. The rituals conducted by these shamans are a synthesis of Korean shamanistic practices and Buddhist or Shugendō elements picked up through their practices in Japan. This article also discusses the significance of the rituals at the Korean temples hold for Korean women in Japan, who are the major patrons for such rituals.

Shima's article examines a folk religion of a certain area of western India, explaining it by analyzing the placement and ranking of the deities within the temple precincts and surroundings. The *bhakti* movement of Hinduism

developed in Mahārāṣṭra with Viṭhobā as the supreme God. This Viṭhobā faith itself developed by systematizing the local deities under the supreme God, and on the other hand incorporated the other gods of mythological tradition in Hinduism. Thus a unique folk tradition developed in the Mahārāṣṭra area. This multi-layered and complex nature, which developed through an historical process, is reflected in the arrangement of the deities within the Viṭhobā temple. This is clarified by Shima's analysis of the pilgrimage course around and in the temple.

Yoshihara's article examines the present state of a folk religion (Dejiao) among the ethnic Chinese originally from Chaozhou in Guangdong province, mainland China, currently in Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. Dejiao has its origin in religious traditions centered around shamanistic rituals passed down from ages past in the Chaozhou area, but around the time of World War II it developed into a "new religion" when a number of leaders arose who organized and began propagating its doctrines and rituals. After the war Dejiao spread overseas along the business route of the overseas Chinese merchants, and it goes without saying that its activity on the Chinese mainland was halted by the advent of the Communist regime. In this article Yoshihara takes up the Dejiao organizations of Hong Kong and Malaysia to examine a folk religion as the response of an ethnic group, specifically the Chinese from Chaozhou, to their current social and cultural circumstances.

These three articles have one point in common. Specifically, they are concerned with the phenomenon of acculturation, of what happens when differing religious traditions meet. Iida and Yoshihara examine the conditions and process whereby the traditional folk religious practices of an immigrant people are changed by their current social circumstances. They both point out that it is the folk religion which not only acts as a symbol but also actively supports the ethnic identity of immigrants and the newer generation. Shima's article also examines the phenomenon of the contact between different religious traditions within the single cultural sphere of Hinduism. He shows how a folk religion of a certain local area can learn from a "greater" tradition while simultaneously incorporating the "smaller" religious traditions of the area to develop into a unique religious tradition.

Conclusion

The theme of this special issue, "Folk Religion and Religious Organizations in Asia" is very broad; yet we present only seven articles which focus

on limited, specific subjects. We can, of course, hardly claim to have covered the entire field of folk religion in Asia.

The study of folk religion requires not only textual studies but also field work. Folk religion is closely related to the daily lives of people in general, and many aspects remain unrecorded because they are an unconscious part of the people's lives. Researchers of folk religion can come to understand their subject matter only through actual field work. In this sense, the articles contained in this issue are all based on the field work of each individual author.

The study of folk religion can be expected to develop into comparative studies as the number of studies on specific folk religious practices, such as the articles presented here, increases. The study of *minkan shinkō* in Japan has tended to be one-sided in its focus on Japanese folk religion. In contrast, the concept of *minzoku shūkyō* is not limited to folk religion in specific localities, and is more suited to the broader focus of international comparative studies. The subjects taken up in this special issue – ancestor veneration, shamanism, acculturation – are clearly subjects which can be the basis for comparative studies in folk religion.

In closing, we would like to acknowledge the work of Kimura Noritsugu in preparing the map of Ise-Shima, Tajima Tada'atsu for compiling bibliographical materials, and Professor Akaike Noriaki for his guiding hand. All of the articles and book reviews were translated into English by Jan Swynedouw and Paul Swanson. Finally we would like to thank the members of our study group for their contributions and cooperation in bringing this special issue to print.

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- 1988 Shima no bongyōji—shinmō no seikaku o megutte 志摩の盆行事—新亡の性格をめぐって [The Bon festivities of Shima: On the character of the *shinmō*]. *Aichi Gakuin Daigaku Bungakubu Kiyō* 愛知学院大学文学部紀要 17.

A report which gathers together and summarizes the joint research on the Shima area. Akaike concludes that the *shinmō* (spirits of the recently deceased) are liminal beings which are dangerous spirits, yet can become beneficent. The Bon festivities of Shima, at the community level, are centered on the *shinmō* and function as an initiation ceremony for the *shinmō* (imperfect spirits) to become ancestral (perfected) spirits.

ARAKI Michio 荒木美智雄

- 1985 *Minzoku shūkyō-sōron* 民俗宗教—総論 [Folk religion: General outline]. In *Nihon shūkyō jiten* 日本宗教辞典 [Encyclopedia of Japanese religion]. Tokyo: Kōbundō, pp. 597–612.

Araki approaches the study of folk religion from the perspective of Eliade's phenomenology of religion. He assumes the dichotomy of religion into the religion of the common people and the religion of the elite which arises from the division of society along with the rise of nations. This religion continues to include archaic religious traditions, while incorporating various elements and parts from the religion of the elite, thus creating, supporting, and developing a folk religion of the common people.

GORAI Shigeru 五来 重, ed.

- Nihon no minzoku shūkyō* 日本の民俗宗教 [Japanese folk religion]. Tokyo: Kōbundō.

HORI Ichirō 堀 一郎

- 1951 *Minkan shinkō* 民間信仰 [Folk beliefs]. Tokyo: Iwanami Zensho.

The first work in Japan which attempted to present a systematic theory on folk religion. Folk religion (*minkan shinkō*) was defined as that which has no specific founder, is not a "revealed" religion, has little or no organized religious institutions, and is an extension of "natural religion." Compared to established religions, folk religion was considered to have little absolute value, and though it was recognized to have some connections with established religions, it was clearly differentiated from them.

- 1968 *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change*. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Alan L. Miller, ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

INOUE Nobutaka 井上順孝, et al., ed.

- 1981 *Shinshūkyō kenkyū chōsa handobukku* 新宗教研究・調査ハンドブック [Handbook on the field work and study of new religions]. Tokyo: Yūzankaku.

MIYAKE Hitoshi 宮家 準

- 1974 *Nihon shūkyō no kōzō* 日本宗教の構造 [The structure of Japanese religion]. Tokyo: Keiō Tsūshin.

Miyake defines Japanese folk religion as the religious system which is the synthesis of the natural religion of ancient Japan with Shinto, Buddhism, Taoism, Ying-Yang, Confucianism, and so forth, and the religious custom of the Japanese not to "belong" to any one specific religion. He follows Hori's lead in describing folk religion as customs in daily life

which are not associated with established doctrine, institutions, or proselytization.

NAMIHIRA Emiko 波平恵美子

1984 *Kegare no kōzō* ケガレの構造 [The structure of *kegare*]. Tokyo: Seitosha.

Often the study of folk religion presupposes the topic's variety and complexity, but Namihira proposes a structural theory of folk religion from an anthropological point of view which claims that from the viewpoint of the believer, folk religion does appear unified. Namihira approaches folk religion from the perspective of the threefold theoretical framework of *hare*, *ke*, and *kegare*.

SAKURAI Tokutarō 桜井徳太郎

1966 *Minkan shinkō* 民間信仰 [Folk beliefs]. Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō.

1982a "Minzoku shūkyō" no ryōiki 「民俗宗教」の領域 [The scope of "folk religion"]. *Shūkyō kenkyū* 250:227-229.

Sakurai began by accepting and expanding of Hori's thesis of the clear distinction between folk religion and established religions, and sought to clarify the features of folk religion in its contact with and the process of interchange with established religion. Sakurai claims that folk religion is always the basic faith structure of local people and thus the receptacle for indigenizing established religions, and provides the source of energy for the creation of new religions.

1982b *Nihon minzoku shūkyōron* 日本民俗宗教論 [On Japanese folk religion]. Tokyo: Shunjūsha.

SHIMAZONO Susumu 島園 進

1978 *Ikigami shisōron* 生神思想論 [On the concept of "living" *kami*]. In *Gendai shūkyō e no shikaku* 現代宗教への視角 [Perspectives on contemporary religions], *Shūkyō Shakaigaku Kenkyūkai* 宗教社会学研究会, ed. Tokyo: Yūzankaku, pp. 38-50.

Distinguishes between *minzoku shūkyō* and *minkan shinkō*, defining *minzoku shūkyō* as that which includes strong *minkan shinkō* elements but is a faith system which, through the continuing influence of an established religion has been penetrated somewhat by that established religion's doctrine and institutional activity. Shimazono has shown that the new religious movements of Japan have arisen on the basis of *minzoku shūkyō*.

SUZUKI Mitsuo 鈴木満男

1972 *Bon ni kuru rei—Taiwan no chūgensetsu o tegakari to shita hikaku minzokugakuteki shiron* 盆にくる霊—台湾の中元

節を手がかりとした比較民俗学的試論 [The spirits who come for Bon: A tentative comparative folk study based on a hint from the Taiwan mid-summer festival]. *Minzokugaku Kenkyū* 37/3.

TAJIMA Tada'atsu 田島忠篤

1987 *Gendai shakai to minzoku shūkyō* 現代社会と民俗宗教 [Folk religion and contemporary society]. In *Sezokuka to shūkyō no mirai* 世俗化と宗教の未来 [Secularization and the future of religion], Anzai Shin 安齋伸, ed. Tokyo: WCRP Heiwa Kenkyūjo, pp. 84–97.

This work discusses the theories on folk religion presented by Hori, Sakurai, Shimazono, Araki, and so forth, and clarifies their points of difference.

TAMAMURO Fumio 圭室文雄, et al., ed.

1987 *Minkan shinkō chōsa handobukku* 民間信仰調査ハンドブック [Handbook for field work on folk beliefs], 2 vols. Tokyo: Yūzankaku.

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1985 *Okinawa no shakai soshiki to sekaikan* 沖縄の社会組織と世界観 [The social organization and world-view in Okinawa]. Tokyo: Shinsensha.

YANAGAWA Kei'ichi 柳川啓一

1987 *Matsuri to girei no shūkyōgaku* 祭と儀礼の宗教学 [The study of religion as festival and ritual]. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.