

REVIEWS

MIYAKE Hitoshi 宮家 準, *Shūkyō minzokugaku* 宗教民俗学. Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppansha, 1989. Index, x + 423pp. ¥4,635. ISBN 4-13-010058-0.

Miyake Hitoshi has deservedly secured a reputation as one of the most stimulating and perceptive of analysts of religion in Japan for his seminal writings on Shugendō and many other topics. His work is generally marked by a concern for establishing and adhering to a coherent and clearly stated methodology, and by an ability to express his theories and data in a readable and accessible manner—something that is perhaps not as widely found in Japanese academic writing as it ought to be.

In this, his latest, work Miyake further develops these concerns by seeking to develop a methodological and theoretical framework for the study of folk religion as an academic discipline. A major motivation for the book is his feeling that, whilst the study of folk religion in Japan and of many of its various components and phenomena such as festivals, folktales, and spiritual healing, has developed apace, there has so far been no concerted, systematized, and theoretically-grounded attempt to place the study of folk religion in Japan into a wider academic framework, and to locate it in, and integrate it with, the academic study of religion in general (pp. i–ii). In this endeavor Miyake is clearly intent on showing that the structure of Japanese folk religion is not, or need not be, unique, but can be analyzed from the same perspectives as any other religious system, and within the framework of the field of religious studies in general. Whilst there may be nothing very striking about this view it is none the less very reassuring to have someone of Miyake's standing make the point so firmly, given the tendencies still lurking in many corners of Japanese academia to deny that anything Japanese can be analyzed in any other framework than its own.

Miyake continues with and extends the terminology and frameworks proposed by Hori Ichirō 堀 一郎, who first asserted the importance of using the term *minzoku shūkyō* 民俗宗教 (folk religion), rather than the more restricted *minkan shinkō* 民間信仰 (folk belief) preferred by earlier writers such as Yanagita Kunio 柳田国男. Whilst Yanagita's concern was with establishing Japanese folkloric characteristics (and, consequently, with focussing on what appeared to be aspects of uniqueness), Hori's, and even more definitively, on the basis of the approaches outlined here, Miyake's, has been with a more comparative framework, and with the establishment of an academic discipline, termed by Hori *shūkyō minzokugaku*, a title Miyake takes up and uses for this book. Miyake's definition of folk religion (*minzoku shūkyō*) is stated clearly early on, with Miyake

viewing it as being based in social experience and founded in the social life of a specific people and area, centered on shared phenomena such as rites, oral traditions, and festivals, that are related also to the economic and social environment of the people involved. He thus establishes something of an opposing relationship between folk religion and universal religion, with the latter defined as being individually focussed, concerned with individual salvation and stemming not from a shared social environment but from the specific teachings of a founder figure.

The whole book revolves around two interrelated themes, the first being the establishment and exposition of a framework and system for studying and analyzing folk religion, and the second the establishment of a theoretically grounded analysis of Japanese folk religion, with the intent of showing that it has a specific world view to which all its component parts, such as myths, rites, and religious art, relate and into which they are integrated. In order to accomplish these tasks Miyake takes us on a long, sometimes involved and, it must be somewhat critically added, an occasionally rather repetitive excursion through many regions of academic theory.

Especially in chapters 2–4 we encounter just about every major name in the study of religion, and social and cultural anthropology, both Western and Japanese (although predominantly the former). As in earlier works by Miyake (see, for example, 1974, esp. pp. 3–17), the influence of Mircea Eliade and his analysis of the relationship between the sacred and profane is still strongly felt. Indeed, Miyake's view that religion is something concerned with the sacred, which is just about the closest he ever gets to a definition of what religion is, runs throughout this volume (e. g., pp. 4, 72). In his analyses, however, Miyake has added to (and to some extent supplanted) his interest in Eliade's ideas with a fascination for structuralism in its various manifestations.

In particular he is intrigued by the developments in the field of semiotics (*kigōgaku* 記号学), which he heralds as a new academic discipline whose applications and methods are of immense use in the study of folk religion (pp. 34–35). As is frequently the case in structuralist analyses, Miyake is concerned first to ground his theories in a linguistic framework. The basic structuralist notion of language as determining the order of the world is given a thorough examination and in chapter 2 in particular we are treated to an overview of the debates within linguistic structuralism and semiotics, with the writings of Saussure, Sapir, Hjelmsk, Jacobson, Peirce and others, while various more definitively anthropological perspectives on these themes, such as the work of Edmund Leach, are also subjected to detailed explanation (pp. 31–56). To some extent behind all these lies the figure and influence of Lévi-Strauss, whose work has clearly had a very large influence on Miyake's work.

In particular the idea of language as a code that transmits messages to those who have a shared understanding of the inner meanings of that code (language) is of major concern to Miyake's notion of folk religion as a system to which its participants are related through a shared experiential and social

environment. The concept of codes and transmitted messages relates also, of course, to religious symbolism, and Miyake takes us into another excursion into the study of religious symbolism, focussing especially on what he sees as the three basic varieties of such symbolism: visual symbols, linguistic symbols, and symbolic actions (p. 45). These three varieties of religious symbolism equate to what Miyake sees as the three basic component elements and areas of folk religion: religious art, oral traditions, and rites. Thus in chapters 3 and 4 he discusses the varieties and structure of religious symbolism from a number of perspectives, especially with regard to the ideas of the sacred and profane, and to the interactions between such categories, especially in terms of time and space.

The basic dualisms of opposing categories such as sacred and profane are expanded into a series of tripartite relationships and interactions, such as are found, for instance, in the Lévi-Straussian analysis of food into raw, cooked, and rotten or, in terms widely used in Japanese analyses and which Miyake returns to again and again, of the relationship between concepts of *ke* ケ, *kegare* ケガレ, and *hare* ハレ. *Ke* is the life power inherent in humans and in everyday life (and hence can be equated in turn with notions of the profane) that, through the processes of daily life along with encounters with polluting and unsettling events such as death, is weakened and thus transformed into the state of pollution (*kegare*), and that consequently requires renewal and revival through contact with aspects of the sacred (*hare*). Festivals, for example, are special times of *hare*, when the everyday life power (*ke*) of individuals and communities is revived, renewed, and cleansed of pollution. The continuing, cyclic, tripartite relationship between *hare*, *ke*, and *kegare* is a theme that occurs repeatedly throughout the book.

Having established many of his theoretical perspectives, Miyake embarks on an analysis of what he sees as the component parts of the folk religious system, both in general terms and, more specifically, in terms of Japanese folk religion. He affirms an agreement with the basic structuralist view that every component part and aspect of a system needs to be analyzed both in and of itself and, equally, in terms of the wider system and with regard to the ways in which it interrelates with other aspects of the system. In all of this it is evident that Miyake regards Japanese folk religion, and indeed any folk religion, as forming a coherent and classifiable system with a coherent world view of its own.

In chapters 5, 6, and 7 he discusses and analyzes the various component elements that he sees as intrinsic to folk religion. In chapter 5 he examines rites, while in chapter 6 he is concerned with oral traditions such as myths, legends, and folktales. Chapter 7 examines religious art, by which Miyake means objects that express religious meaning and symbols within and to the culture in which they occur and to the people that share that culture and its inner codes, and hence can “read” the messages that it symbolizes. In this respect religious art encompasses a broad sweep of phenomena, from religious iconography and paintings, to the Christian Cross, to geographical features such as, in Japanese

terms, the sight of Mount Fuji. All these chapters commence with discussions of the theoretical perspectives of earlier research and move on to applied perspectives centering on Japanese examples.

Chapter 8 discusses the setting of folk religion in terms of ways of life, economic activities, subsistence, and general lifestyle. This includes such focuses as the analysis of the geographical location of residence, in Japanese terms dealing with the relationship between the village (*sato* 里) of the everyday, profane world (*ke*), and the outside, the mountains, which are wild, dangerous, yet associated with the sacred, a source of economic life power (for example, they are a source of water), and hence can be also equated with the holy and with *harae*.

Chapter 9 examines these various issues in terms of social milieu and structure, and looks especially at the question of social affinities. This does not only concern in-group relationships (i.e., the idea of belonging and being part of a group, family, or village) but also the situation where no such affinities apply, a situation characterized by the term *muen* 無縁. As Miyake makes clear, this part of the equation is as important in dealing with villages as are its inner relationships: the outsider as a holy figure, and attitudes to the outside are discussed at length as Miyake makes his contribution to an area greatly in vogue in contemporary Japanese social anthropology, the study of strangers (*ijin* 異人). All these potential dualisms, and all the tripartite relationships between different component parts of the overall, are drawn together in the final section, chapter 10, which seeks to establish the notion of a coordinated and coherent folk religious world view that lies at the core of the Japanese folk religious system, and through which all its parts are given meaning.

The above synopsis does not, I admit, really do the book justice, as much as anything because it only touches on some of the multiple layers of association, analysis, and theory that fill its pages. In reality there is much more to be found in the book, and each chapter alone simply bustles with academic theories and potential interpretations of phenomena. This concern with theories and methodologies is not always beneficial, however. In his desire to construct a theoretical model for the study of folk religion, Miyake at times gets so involved in the writings of other theorists that he tends to disappear from view, and we are left with little more than successive catalogues of what others have said. Many Western academics, I am sure, will find the constant repetition of various structuralist thinkers' ideas, with little added analytical content, rather tedious (even if many will agree with me that Miyake outlining Saussure's thought is far more palatable than having to read Saussure himself!). One might also suggest, in this context, that the book could have benefited from some firm editing, and that it could have made its points in a shorter form. There is a certain circuitous repetitiveness to it, with many theories stated several times over, and with several examples repeating themselves in slightly different contexts in different chapters. There are, for instance, three separate analyses of the symbolic meanings of the spatial structures of traditional Japanese houses at different points in the book.

It is only in the later chapters, when Miyake turns his attention directly to Japan, that he really emerges from the mass of ideas and analyses to give us anything of an understanding of Japanese folk religion and of its potential scope as a dynamic system. When he does so, especially in the last chapter, the book becomes livelier and inherently more readable. To me the highlight here was one of the most stimulating and perceptive interpretations of the nature and symbolic structure of illness in a folk religious perspective, showing it a multi-layered series of messages relating to the nature of social and world order, that I have come across (pp. 399–400).

Probably the most crucial point in the whole framework of this book is whether one can accept that folk religion (whether Japanese folk religion, or the folk religion of any other society) can be regarded as a system in itself. Related to, if not wholly embedded in, this is the extent to which one is prepared to accept structuralist arguments and analyses. Miyake obviously feels justified in seeing the folk religion of any society as a coherent system with a specific world view, but then again, bearing in mind his professed admiration for structuralism and for Lévi-Strauss in particular, this is only to be expected. Personally I am less inclined to go along with him, and am more inclined to regard folk religion as something a little less cohesive and a little more of an amorphous phenomenon (or series of phenomena) than this. Then again, my interest in structuralism in its various guises does not extend to an embracing of its theories and perspectives. Nonetheless I think it is fair to say that, whether one agrees with his theories or not, Miyake has built up a persuasive, if perhaps one-sided, analysis that requires attention and consideration.

The fascination with models and theories, and especially with the ideas of Eliade and Lévi-Strauss, both of whom have a tendency towards idealizing, mythologizing, and romanticizing the “past” and towards eliminating stark realities from their models, does occasionally produce galling results. Thus, at the end of chapter 8, where Miyake has been discussing the religious symbolism of daily life, customs, clothing, the structure of the house, and other such matters, we are presented with a picture of life in a traditional Japanese house, with the family lovingly gathered around the hearth (itself redolent with religious symbolism), in which every aspect of action, clothing, and behavior has both an implicit and explicit religious symbolism (pp. 310–12). This idealized picture seems, at least to my eyes, to imply that Eliade’s *illo tempore*, for Miyake, somehow exists, or existed, in the lives of traditional pre-industrial Japanese farmers, whose every facet of life expressed implicit religious meanings pertinent to their total environment. In terms of theoretical models maybe this makes good reading, but am I being too cynical in asking for something more concrete as proof than a constructed picture of the past? My experiences of eating communal meals sitting around traditional hearths (gleaned in Nepal and Northern India) tell me that there is more emphasis in reality on issues such as coughing, spluttering, and keeping the smoke out of one’s eyes than there is on implicit religious symbolism, and I somehow suspect it was for the Japanese too. A further

issue, which is in many ways connected to this use of the "past" as a construct and as a setting for the examples and models Miyake is discussing, is that nowhere in this book is any attempt made to look at folk religion as a contemporary, ongoing, changing dynamic. In the very last pages (pp. 414–15) Miyake admits that he has not examined the issue of change and offers a few perfunctory lines on possible channels and forms of change in folk religion, but I find this unsatisfactory. By locating his examples, models, and by implication, the dynamism of folk religion, in the past (and an often fictionalized, romantic past at that), Miyake runs the risk of actually denigrating the nature of folk religion, denuding it of its intrinsic vitality and capacity to change and express itself in keeping with its changing environment. In short, he has sacrificed the chance to look at the processes of religious dynamism inherent in folk religion for the sake of an analysis of it in terms of its structure, and in his desire to build theoretical models has jettisoned dynamism for the sake of stasis.

Folk religion is, whichever way one looks at it, clearly not static. As many contemporary studies of Japanese religion have shown, the folk religious world is very much alive today, in the midst of cities as much as in rural areas. Just to touch on one specific element in this, the New Religions represent a major Japanese religious phenomenon that has many of its roots in the Japanese folk religious world. Yet there is virtually no mention of them at all. It would appear, from the characterizations of universal, as opposed to folk, religion mooted earlier, that Miyake would classify these religions as universal because of their founders and doctrinal structures, yet they clearly contain much, in origin, that is of the folk religious world. It would have added to the somewhat preemptory division and definition of universal and folk if at some point this issue (and that of the New Religions in general) had been confronted.

This book would have had even greater validity if it had looked practically at some of these issues. At the same time, however, this book does make a major contribution to the development of the study of folk religion in Japan, providing us with a framework of analysis and interpretation that merits serious consideration. While sometimes the execution of the task can be criticized, Miyake deserves commendation for the endeavors that have gone into this book.

REFERENCE

- MIYAKE Hitoshi 宮家 準
1974 *Nihon shūkyō no kōzō* 日本宗教の構造. Tokyo: Keiō Tsūshin.

Ian Reader
University of Stirling