

## Book Review

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**From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan** By Susumu Shimazono. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2004. 348 pages, ISBN 1-876-843-136 (paperback) US\$ 34.95.

Reviewed by

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Susumu Shimazono, a professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Tokyo, is one of the foremost scholars of the contemporary religious scene in Japan. His research and writing on Aum Shinrikyo have provided fascinating insights into the growth and thinking of this extraordinary movement and his vast number of publications on Japan's New Religions and Japanese religious history stretching from the 1970s has provided Japanese and foreign scholars with an incredibly rich goldmine of material to help them with their own research.

Shimazono's most recent English-language publication, *From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan*, is a rich anthology of his articles on Japan's religions written between 1981 and 2003. The introduction and sixteen chapters of this volume previously appeared in such journals as the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, the *Journal of Oriental Studies*, the *Journal of Alternative Religion and Culture*, and *Social Compass*, as well as chapters in various edited anthologies on Japanese religion.

Shimazono's focus in this book is on the phenomenal growth of Japan's new religions since the Meiji era and of more recent new spiritual movements and culture in Japan. He examines the reasons for their popular appeal, the impact that they have had on Japanese culture and on the evolution of contemporary Japanese society, and on the spread of these movements abroad. He believes this work is especially important because today roughly half of Japan's actively religious practitioners are involved with New Religions and spiritual activities and these movements are having a profound effect on contemporary Japanese society.

The book is divided into five distinct sections. A lengthy introduction provides a very useful overview of the development of Japan's New Religions from the earliest, Nyoraikyoo, a group that emerged in the early nineteenth century, to the evolution of the "Spiritual World" since the 1980s. The first section, "Japan's New Religions in the Broader Scheme," examines the role of New Religions and the sociology of religion in Japan, the religious influences that these religions have had on Japan's modernization since the Meiji era, and the role that "salvation religions" play in modern society. The second section consists of three excellent chapters on "Lotus Sutra-Based New Religions" and the influence of the Nichiren School on a variety of Japan's more prominent religious organizations, including the Soka Gakkai.

Part three provides perspectives on a wide variety of New Religions and "Spiritual Movements" that have grown in prominence in Japan over the past two to three decades. Topics include the

diverse trends of Millennialism in modern Japanese religious history, the growth of "New Spirituality Movements" in Japan including "naturalistic religiosity" (which includes such factors as "alternative knowledge movements (AKMs)," "alternative medicine," "alternative agriculture," and "AKMs and new spirituality movements") and a broad discussion of the growth of psychotherapeutic religion in Japan.

Part four, "Religions and Spiritual Movements After the 1970s," include work on the growth of "New New Religions" and "spirituality" in the 1980s and beyond; the spread of Japan's New Religions abroad; a comparison of the major distinctions between the New Religions, such as the Soka Gakkai, that came of age in the immediate postwar era and those which grew in prominence in the 1970s, 1980s, and beyond; and two final chapters, "New Spirituality Movements and the Spiritual Intellectuals," and "'New Age Movements' or 'New Spirituality Movements and Culture.'"

Since I have been studying the Soka Gakkai movement since the mid-1970s, I am especially interested in Shimazono's 1999 article, "Soka Gakkai and the Modern Reformation of Buddhism." Here Shimazono prefaces his work with the question, "In a world of rapid change, progressively urbanized and information-intensive, what transformations are taking place in Buddhist practice and in the community?" (p. 109). What follows is a lengthy discussion of the doctrines developed by Toda Josei (1900-1958), who rebuilt the Soka Gakkai after World War II, on the "Doctrine of Life Force." Shimazono states that Toda's idea of life-force was a significant move away from the theology of the Nichiren Shoshu sect and of the Gakkai's founder, Makiguchi Tsunesaburo (1871-1944). Shimazono writes that what is of supreme interest here is how this idea of life-force "reshaped the traditional teachings of Nichiren Shoshu in the direction of a belief in this-worldly salvation that is typical of popular Buddhist movements in East Asia in the modern period" (pp. 110-111).

There is also a fascinating chapter on "New Spirituality" movements. Here Shimazono makes links between more traditional Buddhism and some of the New Religions and New Spirituality movements. There are concrete differences between the new spiritualism and traditional Buddhism in that some of these newer movements do not focus as much on an awareness of human suffering and lack a concept of personified agents such as God, gods, or a sacred Other. But, he notes (p. 302) that

[I]f we interpret Buddhism as a teaching that every person can undergo the Buddha's enlightenment as one's own experience if one follows the righteous paths based on the truth, then Buddhism is rather close to the new spirituality movements and culture. Significantly, some persons involved in the new spirituality movements and culture are so sympathetic to Buddhism that they consider their own quest in the new spirituality movements and culture as merely a new evolution of Buddhism for the contemporary world.

This last point is well argued and most interesting. We call many of these religious movements something genuinely new, but scholars such as Shimazono correctly point out their strong roots in more traditional Buddhist or Shinto culture in Japan. To get back to the Soka Gakkai, there are those who assert that the Soka Gakkai is not a real "Buddhist movement," but Shimazono's chapters on the Gakkai, as well as Reiyukai and other Lotus Sutra-based New Religious Movements (NRMs), indicate that many of the most popular of these groups are indeed very Buddhist in their orientation — and quite traditionally Buddhist at that.

The chapter on Reiyukai is very important because it shows that the Soka Gakkai does not have a monopoly on the Lotus-based tradition amongst the NRMs. Reiyukai is today a fairly small

and quiet NRM, but it has fostered other movements, such as Rissho Koseikai which has thrived as a Buddhist-based lay religious movement. Shimazono's analysis comparing and contrasting the Soka Gakkai with the Reiyukai grouping is most helpful.

This rich volume belongs in the library of every serious student of modern Japan because of the wealth of truly scholarly information and insights not only on present-day Japanese religion, but also on contemporary Japanese society as a whole. The diversity of topics discussed in considerable depth and wisdom is quite phenomenal.

The only minor faults of the book lie in its status as a collected anthology of articles written over a span of more than two decades. Despite the fact that the editors have carefully grouped the chapters in terms of topic, the transitions between articles at times can be rather rough. Some of the chapters are also a bit dated. The piece on Japanese new religions abroad was published in 1991 and no apparent effort has been made to update the article. Much has happened to these religions abroad since the early 1990s, and some of these developments should have been noted here.

Despite these minor flaws, this volume by Professor Shimazono is an invaluable resource for every scholar in the field.