REVIEW

Matthew D. McMullen and Jolyon Baraka Thomas, eds.,
The New Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions
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This book is a new edition of *The Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions* (edited by Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson, 2006). However, it is not intended as a substantial update to the previous work; rather, it is positioned as a "companion" that should be read alongside the earlier edition (3). Like its predecessor, this book features contributions from a diverse group of authors who provide concise discussions based on the latest research. Whether beginners or experts, readers will gain a rich understanding of the remarkably complex world of Japanese religions.

One of the main differences between this new publication and its predecessor is the shift from a historical narrative to a thematic approach. In contrast to the previous edition, which organized content by specific periods such as "Ancient," "Eleventh to Sixteenth Centuries," "Early Modern," "Modern Period," and "Contemporary" Japanese religions, the book under review allows movement between different time periods within each topic or section (while the previous edition included some thematic entries, this one is structured entirely around themes). Furthermore, while the earlier work highlighted categories and religious groups such as "Shinto," "Buddhism," "Folk Religion," "New Religions," and "Japanese Christianity," this book seeks to relativize the understanding of religion as sectarian or denominational, attempting to approach the broader realm of religion in a more interdisciplinary manner.

The most significant social change that has occurred since the publication of the previous edition is undoubtedly the global spread and penetration of the internet and social media. In the online world, both past and present information arrives in a flat, interconnected manner. This can fundamentally alter our historical consciousness and likely influences the new structure of this book. Additionally, the internet facilitates connections between individuals that transcend specific organizations

and regions, making it likely that such trends are supporting the relativization of sectarian and denominational understandings of religion.

Here, I will outline the content of each section of this book. The general introduction, "Why Japanese Religions?" by Matthew D. McMullen and Jolyon Baraka Thomas, examines the fluctuations of "world religions paradigm," or "Protestant-centric notions of religion," and the ambiguity surrounding the boundaries of "Japan" and "Japanese." Based on these observations, the authors explain the aims and structure of this book. They point out the interesting fact that while Japanese people seldom understand their actions within the category of "religion," religious vocabulary and concepts are nevertheless pervasive throughout Japanese society. They argue that clarifying this reality will be greatly beneficial not only for scholars of religious studies but also for specialists in Japanese studies who deal with topics outside of religion.

Anna Andreeva's "Knowledge Production" focuses on the production and distribution of knowledge related to religion. She particularly emphasizes the historical diversity of actors involved in religion in Japan and the significant degree of transformation in religious knowledge according to the needs of different regions and groups.

Benedetta Lomi's "Sacred Materialities" examines the power of so-called material religion, including fortune slips (*omikuji*), protective charms (*omamori*), and painted votive tablets (*ema*). These material objects do not merely symbolize faith or the sacred; rather, they possess unique power through various rituals or by being carried or observed. The culture in Japan that recognizes the presence of Buddha-nature or souls in objects suggests that Japan is one of the optimal fields for exploring the material aspects of religion.

Asuka Sango's "Monastic Debate" reveals the substance of debates (*rongi*) in premodern Buddhist temples. These debates were not merely venues for preserving traditional Buddhist doctrines but were creative endeavors open to new interpretations. Katja Triplett's "Ritual Medicine" discusses the relationship between religion and medicine in premodern times. Illness was often attributed to moral issues or the actions of evil spirits, and religious figures and knowledge played significant roles in addressing these issues. Some of that knowledge included influences from India, indicating the circulation of knowledge that crosses national and regional boundaries.

Satoko Fujiwara's "Academia" examines the evolution of academic religious studies in modern and contemporary Japan, including its relationships and differences with neighboring fields. Japanese religious studies have aimed to differentiate themselves from sectarian activities by Buddhist monks, primarily centered around Tokyo Imperial University. It is interesting to note that this field has continued to evolve with considerable involvement from temple-related stakeholders, and recently, it has found part of its *raison d'être* in supporting religious practitioners.

Takashi Miura's "Cosmology and Time" explains how the Japanese worldview and sense of time have been shaped by religious elements. In Japan, a fusion of Shinto and Buddhism has been foundational since ancient times, and gradually, a Buddhist historical consciousness, images of the land, and concepts of auspicious and inauspicious days based on the yin-yang tradition (Onmyōdō) have been formed. Recently, new cosmologies such as feng shui and "power spots" have begun to overlay these traditions.

Jacqueline I. Stone's "Age of Decline" deciphers the significance of the concept of *mappō*, which has had a persistent influence on Japanese Buddhist history from ancient times to the present. The author notes that Saichō (Dengyō Daishi) from the Heian period might be the first person in Japan to teach doctrine from the perspective of "suitability to the time and human capacity (*jiki sōō*)" (124), and provides an insightful perspective on how *mappō* thought paradoxically combines awareness of human limitations with a transcendent understanding of time and space. Miriam Chusid's "Hell" examines the understanding of hell beliefs and salvation from hell in premodern times, referencing various artistic materials. It is revealed that, in general, women faced higher hurdles than men in escaping from hell, reflecting a discriminatory worldview in Buddhism.

Kristina Buhrman's "Geomancy" elucidates various religious significances that humans attribute to geographical realities and directions, such as "demon gate (*kimon*)." This highlights the ways human behavior and concepts are embedded within the surrounding environment. Clinton Godart's "Science and Religion" discusses the relationship between modern psychology, evolutionary theory, and religion, focusing on Buddhism. Throughout the various negotiations between science and religion, the view of "life (*seimei*)" as a profoundly sacred concept expanded significantly in twentieth-century Japan.

Aike P. Rots's "Space and Environment" examines how Japan's natural environment influences the religions of the people living there and, conversely, how religion impacts the natural environment. The ecological significance of religious rituals in the Anthropocene is expected to be an important point for future research.

Sujung Kim's "Sea" introduces the perspective of "sea" or "water" into the study of Japanese religions, which has largely focused on mountainous and flatland activities. The author's view that attention to religious activities surrounding sea can transcend the land-sea dichotomy and lead to research that crosses national and regional boundaries is provocative. Caleb Carter's "Mountains" addresses mountain worship and Shugendō that form the core of Japan's religious traditions. Japanese traditions related to these mountains appear to be undergoing fundamental reinterpretation due to the influences of World Heritage designation, tourism, and therapy culture in recent years.

Emily Anderson's "Migration and Diaspora" focuses on the expansion of Japanese religions into Asia and the religious activities of Japanese immigrants in North America since modern times. The history of Japanese imperialism and foreign wars,

which served as catalysts for the movement of religion abroad, casts a long shadow on contemporary Japanese religions. Tze M. Loo's "Space and Power in Okinawa" highlights Okinawa (Ryūkyū), which has a distinctly different religious culture from mainland Japan. The piece describes how Okinawa's unique religious culture has been maintained or transformed under the dramatic change of governance by the Ryūkyū Kingdom, incorporation into Japan, and the American occupation.

Barbara R. Ambros's "Animals in Ritual Practices" discusses religious rituals for animals, exemplified by the Hōjōe rite. The examination of how this ritual, heavily based on Buddhist views of life and precepts, connects to contemporary pet memorial services is a captivating theme in the history of religion that traverses past and present.

Jessica Starling's "Feeling and Belonging" seeks to transcend traditional views of religion and religious studies that have focused on specific verbalizable beliefs by highlighting the ambiguous and fluid "feeling" that strongly moves individuals. Additionally, she draws attention to the recent trend of multiple affiliations with various religious organizations and cultures, which has been notably prominent in Japan for a long time.

Lindsey E. Dewitt Pratt's discussion of "Confraternities" (*kō*) centers on their history and significance for research. Formed by people who share a particular object of faith, *kō* exhibited nomadic qualities even in a premodern context where social fluidity was relatively low, absorbing and reorganizing various cultural forms and social resources scattered across different regions. Bryan D. Lowe's "Homiletics" examines the embodied practices of those who convey religious teachings, as well as the media used to convey these teachings. It reveals the reality that religious doctrines do not exist in a vacuum; rather, they hold social meaning through concrete bodies, emotions, and various forms of communication and transmission techniques.

Tim Graf and Taniyama Yōzō's "Spiritual Care" introduces the reality of care provided by religious practitioners that has been gaining attention in Japan since the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. Recently, there has been an increasing occurrence of Buddhist monks and other religious figures engaging in nonreligious areas like welfare and healthcare, raising questions about how these trends will influence contemporary Japan, where the demand for mental health care is on the rise. Timothy O. Benedict's "End of Life Care" considers the role of religion in modern Japanese end-of-life care, drawing on Buddhist practices from premodern times. In Japan's super-aged society, the anxiety surrounding the burden on family and friends has become a serious source of spiritual pain, presenting significant challenges for how to address it.

Levi McLaughlin's "Politics and Governance" discusses the dynamic process of religion-state relations in Japan from the premodern era to modern times, under the premise that religion is always evaluated or defined as a political issue. Notably, the rising critical awareness of the Unification Church following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe intricately intertwines discussions about

politics and religion, a point that is frequently referenced not only in this section but also in others.

Mikaël Bauer's "Sovereignty" focuses on the dynamics of political power as seen in ancient Japanese temple activities. The relationship between monarchy and Buddhism varied throughout the early period and is concretely expressed in instances such as the emperor hosting important Buddhist rituals as a dharma king.

Ernils Larsson's "The Two Constitutions" explores the position of religion and the degree of secularism in the Meiji Constitution under the Japanese Empire and in the postwar Japanese Constitution. It suggests that even under the current Japanese Constitution, there are movements seeking a redefinition of Shinto that align closely with the prewar Meiji Constitution, indicating that social consciousness surrounding religion does not evolve in a linear manner.

Adam J. Lyons's "Incarceration and Chaplaincy" addresses prison chaplaincy in Japan, where religious figures, primarily Buddhist priests, serve as chaplains. Their activities are aimed at supporting the social reintegration of prisoners in what is essentially a warehouse for socially deviant individuals. Thus, a dilemma arises in which these chaplains may be unable to fulfill their role of providing spiritual care to the incarcerated.

John Person's "Political Activism" highlights social movements driven primarily by religious figures motivated by nationalism. The cases discussed reveal that in prewar Japan, movements by Buddhist factions such as Nichiren Buddhism, Shin Buddhism, and Zen were prominent, while recent years have seen notable activities from Shinto practitioners, particularly represented by the Shinto Political Alliance (Shintō Seiji Renmei).

Jeffrey J. Hall's "Electoral Politics" discusses the political participation of religious organizations. The cases primarily involve the Kōmeitō party, supported by Sōka Gakkai, as well as the Japan Conference (Nippon Kaigi), which has strong ties to Shinto, and the Unification Church, known for its connections to the Liberal Democratic Party.

In the latter part of this book, there are sections discussing "Fieldwork" and "Resources," each containing multiple entries. "Fieldwork" includes the following topics: Perspectives on Fieldwork (Chika Watanabe), Outer Island (Gotō Haruko), Rural Fieldwork (Paulina Kolata), Religious Industries (Hannah Gould), Digital Ethnography (Kaitlyn Ugoretz), Disability and Accessibility (Mark Bookman), Gender (Dana Mirsalis), and Trust (Timothy Smith). Overall, while the challenges faced by foreigners attempting to engage with the unique customs maintained within Japan's religious world are highlighted, establishing rapport with the individuals involved in the religion is essential in religious studies.

In "Resources," the entries include Perspectives of Resources (Cameron Penwell), The Shōsōin Archive (Sakaehara Towao), Database of Religious Periodicals (Ōtani Eiichi), Buddhist Churches of America Collection (Matthew Hayes), Christian Mission Archives (Esben Petersen), and The East Asia Image Collection (Paul

D. Barclay). From these, it is evident that both analog and digital forms of textual, visual, and material resources are increasingly available for effectively utilizing information related to both premodern and modern history.

The diverse narratives contributed by a majority of authors who are researchers based in Western universities or Western-born researchers affiliated with Japanese universities provide countless fresh insights into the study of Japanese religions, which often tends to be shaped by Japanese scholars for a Japanese audience. On the other hand, as a reviewer who is both Japanese and based at a Japanese university studying Japanese religions, I can think of several topics that I wish had been addressed in this book.

For instance, the relationship between art and religion is one such topic. It goes without saying that many premodern Japanese art pieces are rooted in Buddhism, and insights from art history are essential for a comprehensive understanding of Japanese religious history. Additionally, since the modern period, the introduction of Western-derived concepts and categories of "religion" and "art (fine art)" has resulted in unprecedented changes in how Buddhist creations, including statues, are received, constantly oscillating between the realms of religion and art (see, for example, Ōmi Toshihiro, *Butsuzō to Nihonjin*, Chūōkōron Shinsha, 2018). "The National Treasure ASHURA and Masterpieces from Kohfukuji (Kokuhō Ashura ten)," held at the Tokyo National Museum in 2008, drew over half a million visitors due to the popularity of the Ashura statue from Kōfukuji, and the reflections of the passion people have for Buddhist statues as they relate to the intersection of religion and art is likely to be one mission of Japanese religious studies.

I also wonder whether the topic of the "occult" should have been addressed. Concepts and cultures related to the "occult," such as hypnosis and psychotherapy stemming from mesmerism, UFO cults, and conspiracy theories, are not strictly religious in the conventional sense, but they undoubtedly possess a certain degree of religiosity. This makes them an excellent case for considering the rich practices and ideas associated with religion in Japanese society, where people rarely categorize their actions as religious. The research of Shin'ichi Yoshinaga Shin'ichi (1957–2022), who called himself a scholar of "similar religions" (Yoshinaga Shin'ichi, *Yoshinaga Shinichi serekushon* [Selection], 2 vols., Kokusho Kankōkai, 2024), highlights this point, and the "occult" is already an area in which a certain amount of academic knowledge has been accumulated, making it an essential theme in the study of Japanese religions.

I understand that it is impossible for a single book to cover all themes comprehensively. In the "Postscript" of this book, the authors mention that they wanted to explore the relationship between religion and topics like "sports," "video games," and "pop culture," but could not find suitable writers or that these themes were still in an immature research phase (512). Furthermore, because this book addresses a considerably broader range of themes than traditional texts on Japanese religions, there is a natural inclination to mention topics that are not included. In that sense,

as a guide to the rich world of Japanese religions that cannot be fully explored in just one book, this work certainly fulfills its role more than adequately.

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