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Review of *Overseas Shinto Shrines. Religion, Secularity and Japanese Empire* by Karli Shimizu, London, New York, Dublin: Bloomsbury, 2023. Xii + 278.

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The leading ideas of Karli Shimizu's work are secularism related to the concept of the modern state and the relationship it establishes between the secular sphere and religion. The author's reflections on Shinto shrines from the Meiji period (1868–1912) to the post-war² era are built around them. The scope of her research concerns Shinto shrines in Japan's changing spheres of influence in the period under consideration.

The book is divided into eight parts, the first being the introduction and the last – conclusion. As the author points out, chapters two and seven “contain portions of previously published journal articles” (Shimizu 2023: ix) written by her. The introduction explains the general historical and semantical context in which Shinto shrines are analyzed. Then, the book is divided according to Japan's spheres of influence. Namely, the work explains how Shinto shrines considered in reference to secularism and its influence on understanding religion were used for the establishment of the modern Japanese state, Japanese colonialism, and expansion. Thus, chapters two to six are focused on the following regions respectively: the Home Islands; Hokkaido and Karafuto; Taiwan; Korea; Manchukuo and other parts in the Asia-Pacific area (e.g., the Kwantung Leased Territory, S. Manchurian

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² I.e., the Asia-Pacific War.

Railway Zone, the Micronesian Islands). Chapter seven, being different as it concerns those regions where the Japanese government did not have controlling influence, i.e., the Americas, describes the situation of Japanese migrants in Brazil, the United States, and Hawaii (which became a part of the United States in the 20th century). The last chapter presents a post-war situation of the considered shrines and the conclusion of the whole work. The book discusses the strategies adapted by the Japanese government in its use of Shinto shrines, as well as those of Japanese settlers or Japanese migrants³. Thus, Shimizu's book constitutes an overall picture of the problem, including a rich bibliography. Worth noticing are previous partial studies related to the issues mentioned above (e.g., Maeda 1999, Kotani 1985, Seaton 2016) or some general analyses of Shinto (e.g., Hardcare 2017, Breen and Teeuwen 2010, Kasulis 2004, Ono 1962) or its relationship with the Japanese state (e.g., Hardcare 1989). Special attention should also be paid to such works mentioned by Shimizu as, e.g., Kondō's 1943 *Kaigai Jinja-no Shiteki Kenkyū* (one of the oldest works on the subject) or Nakajima Michio's (Nakajima 2013) studies on the subject (concerning the transformation of the sites where overseas shrines were before).

It should be emphasized that the general terms of secularism, the secular and religion, already mentioned above, alien to the traditional Japanese thought, were adopted by Japan during the Meiji period and then used and adapted for the purposes of the creation and development of the modern Japanese state, as well as its expansion. Therefore, the book constitutes an extensive and valuable case study of a strategy by which a non-Western culture deals with concepts foreign to it⁴ and, therefore, with a broadly understood otherness. In this sense, the results of the work can be used for further comparative research, especially in the field of intercultural hermeneutics⁵. In fact, in Shimizu's book, one can find three main types of otherness the Japanese had to cope with, namely the aforementioned foreign concepts, the Others in Japan's sphere of influence (the category can again be subdivided

³ In particular, on the level of Japan's strategies, it presents a change from a pioneer theology (with its space for local identity and consequently a dose of syncretism in order to develop this identity into a Japanese imperial subject) to a universalized one (with its tendency to create broader identity, however, based on the Japanese foundation). On the individual level, it signals the rejection of the idea of multiethnic Shinto by many Japanese migrants.

⁴ For more on the subject of the adaptation of foreign patterns by Japan see: Pałasz-Rutkowska 2005: 21–83.

⁵ On intercultural hermeneutics see, e.g., Xie 2014: 3–22 and Wong 2014: 165–186. See also Cornille and Conway 2010: ix–xxi on the issue of interreligious hermeneutics.

depending on the sphere of influence), and the Others outside this sphere (e.g., in Hawaii). The strategies, already signalized and described by Shimizu, are worth being subjected to hermeneutical analysis and studied in the context of Japanese hermeneutical strategies towards the otherness, especially to the human Other.

Equally noteworthy is the work methodology with its dynamic structure based on two inextricably linked threads, neither analyzed in isolation from the other. The first thread is the contextually determined dynamic, the changing relationship between the secular sphere and religion in Shinto in the period under consideration (when the separation of the two spheres is needed, the boundary between them becomes clearer, and when it is no longer needed, it becomes blurred). The second thread is the role and place of Shinto shrines analyzed in this dynamic context in the aforementioned period. This structure of considerations, i.e., avoiding the top-down imposition of an abstract or even logically formalized scheme, allows the author to immerse herself in Japanese culture and reflect its characteristic fuzzy, vague⁶ paradigm of defining relationships⁷, which is shown here in the perspective of its adaptive functionality depending on time, place and needs. Moreover, this functionality translates into a specific framework for the reinterpretation of time, space (meta-geography, topography), and ethics⁸.

To conclude, as explained above, Karli Shimizu's book constitutes a significant contribution to the research on Shinto and research methodology on Japanese culture. What is more, as already mentioned, it can be used in the context of interreligious or intercultural research on the issues of adoption, adaptation, and related reinterpretation.

⁶ For more on the subject of vague concepts and the issue of vagueness in the humanities, see Keefe 2000: 6–36.

⁷ Although Heisig, Kasulis, and Maraldo (2011) define the paradigm characteristic of Japanese tradition as one of relations being internal, this leads to the inevitable conclusion that the relation and the elements linked by it are vague. Thus vagueness should be considered as an essential characteristic. For more on the paradigm of relation being internal, see Heisig, Kasulis, and Maraldo 2011: 24–26.

⁸ The spatiotemporal reference point for this framework is linked to Kashihara Jingū, treated as the center, the birthplace of Japanese history, namely the enthronement of the traditional first emperor of Japan, Jimmu. Such a legitimacy of the imperial house was also used to give meaning to ethics. Thus, time, space, and ethics were given a meaning linked to the nation, an imperial subject, and subject's citizenship. This semantic was conveyed, realized, and promoted by shrines placed in the shrine system in the formal Japanese empire and equivalent or informal ones in Asia-Pacific.

Finally, it is worth adding that although secularism plays an important role in the study of modern religion, it cannot be considered as the only perspective. The multitude of definitions of the concept of religion opens up various research possibilities⁹ essential to understanding this complex dimension of human life, in this case, the Japanese one. Thus, although the analyzed period is characterized by weakened syncretic approaches or even the departure from syncretism, it is essential to regard Shimizu's book in the broader context of Japanese tendency to eclecticism and syncretism¹⁰ and especially vagueness – a tendency which escapes sharp distinctions between the secular and the sacred (or the secular and religion). Only by taking into account this broader perspective can one conclude what religion means or meant in Japanese life and appreciate the real meaning of Shimizu's work.

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⁹ Certain methodological examples are presented in, e.g., Kozyra 2019: 41–43.

¹⁰ On the issue of eclecticism and syncretism in Japanese culture see, Kordzińska-Nawrocka 2012: 86–92, 95–96. On the issue of religious syncretism in Japan, see Kozyra 2019: 44–48.

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