

Hideaki Matsuoka, *Japanese Prayer Below the Equator: How Brazilians Believe in the Church of World Messianity*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007. xviii + 175 pages.

Many observers in the West tend to view the concept of globalization as the spread of Western culture to the rest of the world, but the situation is in fact far more complex. My American college students have become passionate about aspects of modern Japanese pop culture; and today several new Japanese religions, such as the Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, the Seichō-no-Ie 生長の家, Perfect Liberty (P L *Kyōdan* 教団), and the Church of World Messianity, have found strong support from hundreds of thousands of non-ethnic Japanese throughout the world. Matsuoka Hideaki's *Japanese Prayer Below the Equator: How Brazilians Believe in the Church of World Messianity* is a fascinating case-study of this Japanese religion's rapid growth in Brazil.

The Church of World Messianity (*Sekai kyūsei kyō* 世界救世教), hereafter COWM, is a prominent Japanese "new religion" founded in 1935 by Okada Mokichi 岡田茂吉 (1882–1955), who derived many of his new faith's teachings from Ōmoto-kyō 大本教, an older "new religion" to which he had previously belonged. Greatly influenced by traditional Japanese Shintō, the heart of the religion centers around the concept of *Johrei* (loosely translated as "God's Healing Light"). Okada is said to have received a divine revelation which empowered him with *Johrei*, permitting him to channel the light of God into other people to remove illness, poverty, and strife throughout the world. Matsuoka reminds the reader that the aim of the COWM is to "realize Heaven on Earth," which means "a world without sickness, poverty and war" (p. 50).

Although the COWM is far smaller than very large Japanese new religious organizations like the Sōka Gakkai, its claims of a worldwide following of 800,000 make it one of the larger of Japan's new religions. Like several other of Japan's new religions, the COWM has made a major attempt to proselytize its faith in Brazil, which has one of the largest Japanese populations outside Japan. In Brazil, the Seichō-no-Ie and Perfect Liberty claim 2.5 million and 350,000 members respectively, placing them ahead of the 300,000 members claimed by the COWM.

Matsuoka, a Berkeley-trained Japanese anthropologist and psychiatrist, has done extensive fieldwork in Brazil focusing on why a Shintō-based Japanese religion would find acceptance in a vastly different culture. Contrary to what one might think, the COWM has the highest rate (60 percent) of non-ethnic Japanese participation of all the Japanese new religions in Brazil. A key reason for this development is that, starting in the 1950s, the first COWM missionaries from Japan immediately focused on propagating their faith in non-Japanese communities. Conversions initially came slowly

but increased very sharply in the 1980s and 1990s once the COWM began developing strong roots in various Brazilian communities.

Matsuoka lists five factors that have contributed to the strong success of Japanese new religions in Brazil:

1. Adoption of Portuguese;
2. Training of non-ethnic Japanese-Brazilian clergy;
3. Adoption of the Brazilian way of life and thinking;
4. Support from Japanese headquarters; and
5. Respect of the relationships between Brazilians and Japanese or Japanese culture.

According to Matsuoka, the fact that the COWM closely adheres to the first four items on this list can partially explain its success in Brazil.

Cultural adaptation, however, is not the only reason why these Japanese religions have achieved success. My studies of Sōka Gakkai activities in Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, Australia, and Canada indicate that the Sōka Gakkai's emphasis on individual self-empowerment to attain one's goals in life and achieving benefits (including greater happiness) here and now have won it a large following among better-educated, younger, and more self-motivated natives. Matsuoka voices a similar discovery about the COWM. He quotes Brazilian followers who are attracted by the religion's doctrine that "human beings can change their lives by themselves" (p. 161).

Matsuoka's work is valuable not only because of his study of the COWM in Brazil but also for his extensive introductory analysis of the history and significance of Japanese new religions in general. Because of these extensive background comments, this study is accessible to both specialists and general readers alike. The research and bibliography are superb, and the writing is clear. The author's experience of being on a Brazilian COWM pilgrim bus that was hijacked by four bandits—and the surprising reaction of the pilgrims to this situation—makes for fascinating reading (chapter 6). The only disappointing section of the book is the very brief conclusion that fails to discuss adequately the significance of many of Matsuoka's findings.

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