

Hugo Córdova Quero and Rafael Shoji, eds., *Transnational Faiths: Latin-American Immigrants and their Religions in Japan*

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Japan today is becoming a truly multicultural and multi-ethnic country. Since the early 1980s, thousands of immigrants from Latin America have arrived in Japan looking for work. Religion scholars Cordova Quero and Rafael Shoji have edited a fascinating book, *Transnational Faiths: Latin American Immigrants and their Religions in Japan*, which studies the impact these ethnic Japanese immigrants are experiencing in local

faith communities in Japan. The book focuses on the *Nikkeijin*, descendants of Japanese emigres to Latin America who return migrated to Japan in the 1990s. Although the writers include ethnic Japanese immigrants from other parts of Latin America, the focus of the book is on *Nikkeijin* from Brazil. The book concentrates on two directions. On the one hand, it examines the role of faith and religious institutions in the migrants' process of settlement and integration. On the other hand, it studies the impact of migration religiosity amidst religious groups already established in Japan. Religion is seen more and more as an integral aspect of the displacement and settlement of migrants in a growing multiethnic and multicultural Japan.

Transnational Faiths consists of an introduction by the editors, which introduces the major themes of the book and nine chapters that study different aspects of these transnational faiths and the people who adhere to them. Rafael Shoji discusses the making of Brazilian Japanese Pentecostalism and how immigration is a main factor for religious conversion. Masanobu Yamada in his chapter "Bestowing the Light of the Gospel in Japan" analyzes the formation of an ethnic church in the *Nikkeijin* community. In Chapter 3, So Hoshino examines "The Potentiality of Brazilian Immigrants' Religious Communities as Social Capital Studying: The Case of Christian Churches Under an Economic Depression." Nilta Dias focuses on Brazilian children and religious practices in everyday life in Japanese schools. Marcela Inés Méndez Vasquez writes about female sex workers and the Roman Catholic Church's advocacy for human rights. Olmes Milani reports on the religious experiences of Peruvian immigrants in Japan while Regina Yoshie Matsue investigates the activities of Soka Gakkai and Sekai Kyūseikyō among Japanese Brazilians in Japan. Ushi Arakaki writes on "Becoming Brazilian in Japan: Umbanda and Ethnocultural Identity in Transnational Times." Editors Rafael Shoji and Hugo Cordova Quero conclude the book with their chapter "Transcendental Communications: The Reinterpretation of the Brazilian Spiritist *Continuum* in Japan."

During the 1980s, Japan was confronted with a growing shortage of workers willing to do the so-called "Three "K" jobs: *kitsui* (difficult), *kitanai* (dirty), *kiken* (dangerous). Japan's Ministry of Labor tried to resolve the problem by granting work visas and promises of high pay to ethnic Japanese (up to three generations) living in Latin America to migrate to Japan to work in factories and in construction. The vast majority, estimated at over 300,000, came from Brazil with others coming from Peru, Argentina, and elsewhere in Latin America.

Many of these *Nikkeijin* have had a hard time adapting to their residencies in both Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America as well as in Japan. Although ethnic Japanese in Brazil found work and often prospered there, many Brazilians have regarded them as outsiders who were not a part of mainstream Brazilian society. When they migrated back to Japan a century after their parents or grandparents had left Japan, they found that most Japanese regarded them as foreigners who would not be accepted into Japanese society despite their Japanese ethnicity.

Several authors in *Transnational Faiths* study the role of religion in the lives of Japan-based *Nikkeijin* as they seek to adapt themselves in Japanese culture. Most find that religion is the glue that binds them together. "Religion is an integral aspect of the displacement and settlement process of immigrants in an increasing multi-ethnic, multicultural, and pluri-religious contemporary Japan. Religious institutions and their social networks in Japan are becoming the first point of contact among immigrants" (2).

Ushi Arakaki, in her chapter “Becoming Brazilian in Japan: Umbanda and Ethnocultural Identity in Transnational Times,” opens with a powerful statement that encapsulates the major parameters of this book. She states that this is a story of ambivalence concerning *Nikkeijin* who feel less authentically Brazilian when residing in Brazil and who do not see themselves as genuinely Japanese when settling in Japan. In essence, it is a tale of a large group of people who left their own country in order to feel fully part of it. But as is the case in studies of other ethnic return migrations, what has happened to the Brazilian *Nikkeijin* in Japan is common with other groups of return migrants who come to realize that in their ancestral homeland they are in fact cultural foreigners. The discrimination that they face as well as their often-degrading work experiences made them distance themselves from their ethnic homeland and often encouraged them to strengthen their ties with their country of birth. This often produces a form of “deterritorialized migrant nationalism in which the national loyalties are articulated outside the territorial boundaries of the nation state.

The *Nikkeijin* in many cases turned to both familiar and unfamiliar religious institutions for aid and comfort. As institutions, these religions give the immigrants a place to socialize and comfort each other. They can meet their compatriots, talk in their own language, and share their experiences with each other. But there is more. Many of these religions perform invaluable social services, including language training in Japanese, assistance in finding housing, and meeting native Japanese who will socialize and work with them.

Regina Yoshie Matsue’s study of the Soka Gakkai’s participation in this process is a good illustration of the role of religion in fostering the socialization process of Latin American-Japanese. Soka Gakkai offers immigrants community activities designed to foster among their members a sense of belonging, encouraging them to believe that they are members of a worldwide Soka family. There is an attempt to “place the individual’s needs in the centre, fostering individuals to assume responsibility and autonomy for their own lives and to become actors and agents of their own destinies” (170). The Soka Gakkai, along with some of Japan’s other new religions, is providing a sense of belonging to the migrants.

The strengths of this book are intensified by the fact that each chapter is written by specialists who have conducted ethnographic research in each religious community and who have carefully compiled empirical evidence to support their conclusions. Their analyses and commentary is both lucid and clear. This work would be of special interest to any scholar or student of social change in Japan or the transnational expansion of religions. It would also be useful for any graduate course focusing on contemporary Japanese society.

Hugo Cordova Quero and Rafael Shoji tie together some of the broad themes in their concluding chapter, but their approach here is rather shallow and begs the question concerning where future scholars should conduct research along the lines presented in this worthy book. A deeper and more considered conclusion would have certainly have helped the reader gain a better view of the “big picture” presented here.

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