Chika Watanabe, *Becoming One: Religion, Development, and Environmentalism in a Japanese NGO in Myanmar*

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Even without an interest or background in the multiple disciplines Chika Watanabe draws upon, this book is nonetheless more than accessible to readers of many different levels of experience and engagement. It is an accessible and finely balanced explication that is equal parts empathetic and critical. The reader will certainly find the world we are invited to explore to be an utterly fascinating place full of contradictions and other moving parts. One of the most fascinating things is seeing how different people generate a sense of completeness through their attempts to make a universal *furusato* (homeplace). The richness of the ethnographic narratives, particularly the way in which the aspirations and criticisms of the people involved are elucidated, presents perspicacious insights into the way a particular "Japanese" social, cultural, and economically sustainable development model is cultivated and promoted at the international level. As if parachuting in, from the first page, we are seemingly dropped straight into the "Burmese jungle" at early morning roll call. The military-like discipline and unfamiliar disposition of the Organization for Industrial, Spiritual, and Cultural Advancement (OISCA) training center in Myanmar overwhelms Watanabe. It is her autoethnographic anecdotes that are most indelible, particularly as the fieldwork then moves between different locations (regional offices and training centers) across both Myanmar and Japan.

My only criticism is that this book is too short. I could have read a few more chapters. It is then a strength of this book that such detailed information is cogently presented across six chapters, each about thirty pages in length. Flicking back through the copy I have just read, it seems that chapter 2, "The Politics of 'Shinto' Environmentalism," caused the most amount of underlining and notetaking in the margins by this humble reviewer.

Chika Watanabe offers a unique perspective regarding the entanglement of religion, development, and environmentalism. This is a very interesting topic as it touches on the entangled ethics of development work and how faith/religion is woven into the core of this project. I was drawn to this book because it focuses on a unique aspect of the anthropology of development. Generally speaking, this is an important yet overlooked topic that deserves more attention than it currently receives.

The general narrative of development work is that NGOs are typically neoliberal, bureaucratic, and managerial (3), which tends to enable privatization of welfare, exacerbate class differences, and induce individualized entrepreneurialism. While Watanabe does explore these important issues—and also includes an explication of institutionalized knowledge practices and the encompassing moral-social worlds—a prominent feature of the book is how it documents, what could be for the first time, a non-Christian, international, faith-based development operation. It is especially unique due to the focus being a Japanese organization operating in a postcolonial region.

Filled with fascinating insights into the aspirations and fears of a variety of people, in both Japan and Myanmar, who are drawn into the various connections with OISCA, we learn about the historical context and lived experiences of long-term, intergenerational members, who are committed to what the international website for

OISCA states as its vision and mission, which involves promoting international cooperation through three things: (1) industrial engagement, (2) spiritual foundation, and (3) cultural involvement (The Organization for Industrial, Spiritual, and Cultural Advancement-International n.d.). We also learn about the people who are left behind by those felt compelled to spend decades away from their families, as the culture of the organization essentially demands total commitment.

Although OISCA seemingly presents itself as a secular organization, while not necessarily promoting its connections to Ananaikyō, which is a somewhat controversial, post-1945 new religious movement in Japan that was founded in 1961, today, OISCA is much more famous than the organization it evolved from. Ananaikyō was born from Omotokyō and the tradition of Chinkon Kishin. Originally, these were shamanic practices involving mystical breathing and ascetic practices (practiced in the mountains, like standing under a waterfall in winter) that were largely used for cultivating and channeling power, which today has a popular expression in many aikido dojos around the world.

OISCA is rather infamous in Japan because of its anachronistic and conservative political attitudes it has inherited from Ananaikyō and then from Omotokyō. Both religions claimed a fundamentally essentialized position that all religions have one root, which is ultimately an expression of a deep eco-theology, and that Shinto is ultimately the best expression. The issue is made clear through the idea that the "Shinto" environmentalism of OISCA connects particularist ideas about Japaneseness with global environmental movements (86). What this can potentially catalyze, while also obfuscating, is how certain cultural nationalist arguments can become vehicles for claiming universals, which ultimately walks a very fine line between the promotion of universal fraternity and a soft-power, expansionist aspiration of empire. We see this occurring in other faith-based development organizations. A parallel example is the Art of Living Foundation that promotes a similarly banal version of Hinduness through the sanitizing guise of being the catalyst for an imagined, yoga-inflected, sustainable lifestyle.

Watanabe engages with many long-term volunteers and staffers, giving them the space to explain the way they relate to the "religious" origins of OISCA in different ways. In the introduction, OISCA's moral imagination of "Becoming One" is contextualized (4). This pertains to a particular expression of Japaneseness, or Japanese values, which, at least according to OISCA, emphasizes communal living and labor, organic agricultural activities, and an imagined planetary ecological unity that OISCA members are instructed to orient their lives toward.

Watanabe presents a compelling overview of the cultural nationalist moral imagination that binds development with environmentalism and Shintoism. Early on, Watanabe explains that one of the driving questions the book seeks to understand is how the idea of "becoming one," embedded in the moral imagination and entangled with historical, political, and trans-regional implications, as well as its transformative potential, appeals to the aid actors it does (6). One of the most striking motifs shared by all is the level of personal sacrifice many of the aid actors endure. Particularly, how people compartmentalize their own financial, social, and personal needs for the opportunity to experience lasting individual transformation, through imbibing not necessarily the collective identity but instead the discipline of sticking to the program. In chapter 6, we learn about how "Discipline as Care" involves adhering to the ethos of persevering even during times of failure and working toward cultivating the attitude of "attentive tinkering" (173).

Watanabe succeeds in presenting an organization filled with passionate, disciplined,

hard-working people, many of whom are aware of the contradictions and historical entanglements just as much as they are aware of the potentials to achieve sustainably harmonious lives. What is captured is not a "warts and all" exposé but rather a compelling account of humans trying to be and do better.

References

The Organization for Industrial, Spiritual, and Cultural Advancement-International. n.d. "Vision and Mission." Accessed 10 December, 2019. http://www.oisca-international.org/about/mission/

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