

Abstract of Doctoral Thesis

The Movement of People's Religion in the Religious Society around 1800: Focus on Nyoraikyo at Nagoya

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Graduate School of Letters

Ritsumeikan University

イシハラ ヤマト

ISHIHARA Yamato

This paper attempts to re-examine the historical position of people's religion.

Based on modernization theory, previous studies have pointed out the gradual growth of modern religion, and the possibility of the nation resisting the people's religion. These studies have only emphasized the aspect that people's religion transcends other religions and societies. Therefore, people's religion has been appreciated as being separated from the movement of society around 1800. However, the foundation of modernization theory started fluctuating since 1990. Hence, popular religion study also lost its base and its historical position.

In response to these research trends and to relativize this research field itself, I have examined Nyoraikyo. I identified Nyoraikyo's historical significance by positioning it in the religious society of the late Edo period. Specifically, I have attempted to clarify the origin of religion and the development of the doctrine by examining the trends of religious society around the year 1800, the time when the guru and the believers lived. By revealing people's practices of various faiths at that time, I clarify the demands of Nyoraikyo's believers, and analyze the relief of people's religion as a situation that believers and gurus were confronting.

In Part 1, I focus on Sango Wakuran—a religious controversy in Shin-Buddhism, referred to as the greatest disturbance in Edo religious history. The discussion of the series of riots is presented in the context of the latest Japanese historical studies. I examine people's religion as a part of this movement in contemporary religious trends in an attempt to portray a new viewpoint on the Edo history of religion.

In chapter 1, I place Sango Wakuran as the starting point of the big disturbance of religion in the Edo period. This viewpoint helps see the transformation of the relief paradigm. I have indicated that the method of relief was sought by analyzing the increasing religious controversies after 1750, and the believers' reaction to the trend.

Nyoraikyo's preaching showed that it faced the same problem because the practice was initiated and followed during the same period as Sango Wakuran.

In chapter 2, I explore the characteristics of Nyoraikyo's doctrine by examining its relationship with the Shin-Buddhism's development in Nagoya. It is clear that the method of relief was also problematic in Nagoya. The religious controversy in Nagoya emphasizes that the relief should focus on the state of the mind. Based on this premise, by analyzing Nyoraikyo's preaching, I clarify that this doctrine emphasized the same relief as Shin-Buddhism.

In Part 2, I revealed what kind of role Nyoraikyo played in the relief paradigm around 1800, and what kind of features it had.

Chapter 1 examines the background of the emergence of the method of relief—which is based on the state of the mind—based on the behavior of the people who desired salvation around 1800. In that time, a huge number of temples (or shrines) were either newly built or remodeled. People who desired to get relief were not hesitant to contribute physically and monetarily for the temples. Their behavior was based on the Sazen Shiso theory (a belief that good deeds will bring them more blessing). In a society where the belief that salvation by good deeds was shared, Nyoraikyo denied the practice and emphasized the relief focusing on the state of the mind. Therefore, Nyoraikyo was able to attract people who could not participate in relief by good deeds.

In chapter 2, I analyze how the new religion, Nyoraikyo, found social standing. I focus on the development of the Akiba faith that flourished in the same place at the same time with Nyoraikyo. The god of Akiba was often referred to in Nyoraikyo's preaching. Because of this heterogeneous religious practice, the Akiba faith became, for Nyoraikyo, unignorable. Nyoraikyo distilled and formed its own cosmology, including several elements of the Akiba faith, which is how Nyoraikyo handled Akiba. This transformable cosmology was central to why Nyoraikyo attracted so many followers and achieved such social influence at the time.

Chapter 3 examines Nyoraikyo's preaching about the Bunsei Great Earthquake, so as to understand Nyoraikyo's signature, which was a reaction to the reality. Nyoraikyo explained the earthquake on a cosmology level while taking into consideration the problem of people's mind. Because of an immediate and improvised response in extraordinary situations, Nyoraikyo was successful in receiving an enhancement in its own relief. The transformation possibility of Nyoraikyo's preaching affected not only extraordinary situations but also everyday religious life, and played the role of maintaining and reproducing the attractiveness to keep followers attracted in a period where many gods appeared one after another.

Finally, I attempt to position Nyoraikyo historically by relating the relief paradigm and the relief focusing on the state of the mind with the social change of Nagoya at the time. I point out that the viewpoint adopted in this paper may also help collectively capture the trends of various religions occurring in the late Edo period.