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Review: Issei Buddhism in the Americas

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Review: Issei Buddhism in the Americas by Duncan Ryuken Williams and Tomoe Moriya (eds.). Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010. 216 pp. \$25.00 paper. ISBN 978-0-252-07719-7.

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Issei Buddhism in the Americas makes a unique contribution both to Asian and Asian American studies. The authors premise *Issei Buddhism in the Americas* as a final stage in *bukkyo tozen*, the eastward-moving transmission of Buddhism from India traditionally thought to have ended in Japan. Their work is thus a contribution to Asian studies, both in terms of how Japan entered a global age and of extending the analysis of a Japanese religious form to the Americas. Following Eiichiro Azuma, the editors and their colleagues demonstrate that *Issei* Buddhists lived "between two empires," as their experiences of dislocation from Japan and relocation during the American internment transmitted Buddhism farther into the American interior. This volume's particular strength is in the authors' extensive usage of Japanese language sources, a method that transcends the contemporary historiography's over-dependence on *Nisei* Christian sources. That said, most of the essays also position first-generation Japanese forms of Buddhism in relation to versions of Christianity found in the Americas. Indeed, using the migrants' own language gives voice to the *Issei* actors who negotiated the politics of Buddhist theology and practice in the Americas. This book thus fills a gap in the Japanese American studies literature with its emphasis on the agency of Japanese religious practitioners who were not simply victims of colonization but actors with complex motives and relational networks in the Americas.

This book is divided into four sections with two essays in each. The first section explores the dynamics of local and translocal Japanese Buddhist identity formation in the Americas. Cristina Rocha argues that the fusion of Soto Zen and Roman Catholicism by Japanese Brazilians is best understood as "creolization" (as opposed to "syncretism") because it emphasizes identity formation as a continuous multi-generational process of negotiating Brazilian religious vogues and the integrity of Zen. Masako Iino demonstrates through Japanese-language *Nisei* publications that *Issei* *bukkyokai* (Buddhist worship centers) in British Columbian Japanese communities in the 1900s-1930s produced *Nisei* who saw their *Yamato-damishii* (Japanese spirit) as contributing to their sense of Canadian citizenship, not detracting from it. Unique to this section is its emphasis on the Japanese migrants' agency in relation to American nations outside of the United States where *Issei* and *Nisei* Buddhists were not simply colonized by their destination nations but active in creolizing their religions and cultures.

The second section illustrates the spillage of intra-Japanese conflicts over Americanization into the American legal system. Noriko Asato addresses the Hawaiian Japanese language school controversies that led to their suppression in 1919 (reversed by the Supreme Court in 1927): her Japanese sources reveal that the 1919 crisis overflowed from Japanese Christians attempting to saturate the educational system in order to prevent Buddhists from owning language schools. Among *Issei* Buddhists themselves, Michihiro Ama demonstrates that the 1917-1918 split within the *Jodo Shinshu* community in Los Angeles (when the *Nishi Honganji* tried to consolidate their *bukkyokai*) was largely due to a misuse of the American legal system to suppress the insubordinate Rev. Izumida Junjo. Such internal contestation reveals that when Japanese Buddhists in the Americas exercised their agency, their actions shattered the image of a universally harmonious Buddhist migrant community.

The third section considers the idea of Buddhist universality by examining the transmission of Issei Buddhist teaching to the Americas through global Anglophonic print culture. Lori Pierce locates the English-language periodical *The Light of Dharma* as a Jodo Shinshu missionary effort to construe Buddhism as a universal religion in order to disrupt global Anglophone Orientalist perceptions of it. Tomoe Moriya presents a doctrinal account of "Americanized" Buddhist theology in the work of D.T. Suzuki, Yemyo Imamura, and Kenko Imamura to show that the process of Americanization reformulated Issei Buddhism as a democratic, cosmopolitan, and pacifist religious tradition with universal ideals. Both of these accounts reveal that Buddhism had to present itself globally and that the religion's supporters wrote from Japanese American positionalities that often clashed with other local faiths and state ideologies.

The fourth section deals with the spirituality of Japanese Buddhists during World War II. Akihiro Yamakura analyzes Tenrikyo, a Japanese religion neither Buddhist nor Shinto. Focusing on the Tenrikyo North American bishop Masaharu Hashimoto, he argues for a multi-dimensional interpretation of the harsh treatment of Tenrikyo ministers during the internment due both to their uncritical allegiance to a State Shinto that loosely called the Japanese emperor a divinity and the rise of American xenophobia toward "enemy aliens." Keiko Wells concludes the volume with an analysis of Buddhist song culture transmission in Kona. She elucidates the wartime practices of Issei surrendering completely to Amida Buddha as an Oya (parent) who would guide the Japanese through tragedy. These explorations of the inner life of Issei religious practitioners during the trauma of the Pacific War provides a corrective to an internment literature that has focused on Japanese internees as merely victims of American nativist policy, emphasizing instead the complex spiritual agencies of the internees through religious practice.

This volume opens avenues in Asian American religious studies as it demonstrates that Buddhist practices, up till now largely ignored, are key to our understanding of the agency of Japanese Americans in a historical period where they have been largely construed as victims. The only concern I had with this volume was the occasional editorializing by the authors who make it appear obvious that Buddhists were of course missionaries and inevitably made to negotiate their identities in the Americas. While such identity formation is indeed necessary, the volume could do more to address what it was particular about this extension of *bukkyo tozen* to the Americas that was different from Buddhist transmission from India to Japan and required such complex identity negotiations. This said, these collected essays open up future directions for further research in Japanese American history. Might there be studies, for example, of the theology behind the practice of the Japanese Christians who are cast as the nemeses of Issei Buddhists in this volume? Could there be further studies of what in Jodo Shinshu and Zen teachings that created such Issei missionary impulses? These questions may be answered in the authors' further work; indeed, a glance at the "About the Contributors" section reveals that these essays are based on previously published works and are not original to this volume. In this sense, this collection serves as a competent introduction to a larger literature on Japanese American religions as they are inextricably intertwined with Japanese American history. We have been well served by the efforts of Duncan Williams and Tomoe Moriya, who open up the "black box" of Japanese American agency through the religions these migrants brought with them when they came from Meiji Japan to the Americas.

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