

Multiple Religious Belonging in Shin'ichirô Imaoka's Free Religion

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Abstract

This paper reconsiders the critical examinations of the concept of religion through Catherine Cornille's framework of Multiple Religious Belonging. Cornille provides a comprehensive analysis of various forms of Multiple Religious Belonging, ranging from the conscious belonging to multiple religions to the unconscious acceptance of religious culture without a clear awareness of belonging to any particular religion. However, the religious belonging examined in this analysis refers not to Belonging to the Religion but to belonging (or non-belonging) to specific religious groups. In contrast, Shin'ichirô Imaoka's Free Religion (Jiyû-shûkyô) endorses the concept of dual belonging to the religious organization to which each person already belongs and to the church of the Free Religion, namely, the Tôkyô Kiitsu Kyôkai (Tokyo Unitarian Church). Imaoka placed significant emphasis on personal salvation through the pursuit of the fundamental Life without being confined by the doctrines of one's own religion; at the same time, he firmly believed in the indispensability of a church in the realization of an ideal community and the attainment of social salvation. Imaoka's Free Religion, constructed within the context of religious studies in modern Japan, resulted in the establishment of a substantive church, the Tôkyô Kiitsu Kyôkai, to which Free Religionists could belong while also belonging to the organization of their own religion. The notion of dual belonging, which makes possible both Belonging to the Religion and Believing in the Religion, offers a novel perspective for the critical examination of the concept of religion.

和文要旨

本稿では、カトリーヌ・コルニールの「複合宗教帰属」の観点から宗教概念の批判的検討を再考する。コルニールは、複数の宗教への意識的な帰属から特定の宗教への帰属を明確に自覚しない宗教的文化の無意識的な受容まで、さまざまな「複合宗教帰属」の形態を総合的に分析している。しかし、この分析で検討されている宗教帰属は、特定の宗教集団への帰属（あるいは非帰属）であり、「宗教」への帰属ではない。それに対し、今岡信一良の「自由宗教」は、各人がすでに帰属している宗教組織と、自由宗教の教会すなわち東京帰一教会との二重帰属の概念を認める。今岡は、自分の宗教の教義に縛られず、根源的な「生命」を追求することによる個人的な救済を重視したが、同時に、理想的な共同体の実現と社会的救済の達成においては教会が不可欠であると確信した。今岡の「自由宗教」

は、近代日本の宗教研究の文脈の中で構築されたものであるが、実体的な教会である東京
帰一教会を設立するに至った。「宗教への帰属」や「宗教を信じること」を可能にする二
重帰属の考え方は、宗教概念の批判的検討のための新たな視角を提供するものである。

1) Introduction: Is Belonging to the Religion possible?

This paper will reconsider the critical examination of the concept of religion from the perspective of religious belonging.

In this examination, the concept of religion is frequently regarded as a social construction by scholars and others. While this viewpoint may indeed be valid, it is important to recognize that, once a concept of religion has been established, it can lead to the formation of substantial organizations. Belonging to these organizations, so to speak, can be regarded as Belonging to the Religion.

Is it possible to Belong to the Religion possible? To further illuminate this question, it is essential to contrast it with Catherine Cornille's notion of Multiple Religious Belonging. Cornille (2013) offers a comprehensive analysis of various forms of Multiple Religious Belonging, ranging from the conscious belonging to multiple religions to the unconscious acceptance of religious culture without a clear awareness of belonging to any particular religion. However, the religious belonging examined in this analysis refers not to Belonging to the Religion, but to belonging (or non-belonging) to specific religious groups.

This paper will introduce Shin'ichirô Imaoka (今岡信一良, 1881-1988) 's concept of Free Religion and the Tôkyô Kiitsu Kyôkai (東京帰一教会, Tokyo Unitarian Church), which he founded, as a case in which the concept of religion formed in modern Japan materialized into a substantial organization and made Belonging to the Religion possible.

2) What shaped Shin'ichirô Imaoka's religious thought and practice?

To begin with, I would like to provide a concise introduction to the background of Imaoka's religious thought and practice, which was shaped by the context of religion and religious studies in modern Japan at the beginning of the 20th century.

Though Imaoka was born into a Shin Buddhist family, he was baptized in the Anglican Church at the age of 16. Imaoka entered Tokyo Imperial University, and studied under Masaharu Anesaki (姉崎正治, 1873-1949), one of the pioneers of Japanese religious studies. Anesaki studied abroad between 1900 and 1903 and introduced to Japan the most advanced religious and Sanskrit studies of the time (Anesaki 1974). His religious studies combined an empirical and comparative understanding of religions with a mystical pursuit of the essence of religion and contributed significantly to the introduction of the concept of religion in modern Japan. He was deeply involved in the Kiitsu Kyôkai (帰一協会, Association Concordia) and other movements that promoted inter-

religious cooperations, and Imaoka assisted Anesaki's activities. It is noted that this "Kyôkai" is not a church (教会), but an association for the understanding each other's religion and the cooperation among religions.

As Imaoka began to question his orthodox beliefs, he came to understand liberal theology, and then, in 1911, he converted to Unitarianism. It must be noted that Unitarianism in modern Japan was not only a Christian denomination, but also an inter-religious movement which included some Buddhists and provided a place to understand each other's religions.

I would like to introduce three more key people who led Imaoka's inter-religious faith. Ryôsen Tsunashima (綱島梁川, 1873-1907) provided detailed descriptions of his own mystical experiences, from which he developed his religious thought centered on the awareness that human beings are the children of God. Imaoka learned from Tsunashima the importance of a pluralistic faith based on mystical experience, not on a specific religion (Furuso 2022).

In contrast, Tenkô Nishida (西田天香, 1872-1968) sought to actualize the truth that religions already possessed in their teachings but had not yet fully realized, through the practices of a New Life of penance and service with no property (Nishida 1968). With an introduction of Nishida, Imaoka encountered Torajirô Okada (岡田虎二郎, 1872-1920)'s Seiza (静坐, sitting meditation), which he practiced for the rest of his life. It is important to note that Nishida's New Life and Okada's Seiza were the practices that were not confined to any particular religion (Kobayashi 1937).

These mystical and pluralistic ideas and practices shaped Imaoka's concept of religion and led him to the development of the concept of Free Religion and the establishment of the Tôkyô Kiitsu Kyôkai.

3) Dual belonging in Tôkyô Kiitsu Kyôkai

Next, I would like to discuss that Imaoka's concept of religion and his pursuit of genuine religion made possible a dual belonging, that is, the belonging to one's own religion and the belonging to Tôkyô Kiitsu Kyôkai.

I will start with Imaoka's Free Religion. He believed that the Free Religion is not a religion separate from established religions, but a search for genuine truth within established religions. He asserted that this genuine truth is Fundamental Life (Imaoka 1982: 23). In the Free Religion, however, Free Religionists were not required to adhere to the Fundamental Life as Imaoka did, but rather they were encouraged to seek their own genuine truth within their own religion to which they belonged, independent of its dogma.

However, Imaoka asserted that Free Religionists also needed a community other than the community of their own religion. Imaoka sees personal salvation as unattainable apart from social salvation, and he believes that the church, understood as an ideal community, is indispensable for

personal salvation (Imaoka 1982: 63-64). Imaoka said, only when individuals “personally and voluntarily have a genuine article of religion can a genuine church be organized” (Imaoka 1982: 82).

Founded around 1948, the Tōkyō Kiitsu Kyōkai was born out of the Unitarian movement in Japan, but it is not a church based on any Christian denomination. It is neither a meta-religion that advocates pluralistic religious thought, nor an organization for interreligious dialogue. Imaoka regarded the Tōkyō Kiitsu Kyōkai as an ideal community in which each Free Religionist could seek the genuine truth within his or her own faith, and moreover, as a church which was as actual and concrete as other established religions (Imaoka 1982: 81). According to Imaoka, Free Religionists can achieve personal salvation by belonging to both their own church and the Tōkyō Kiitsu Kyōkai. This dual belonging enables the discovery of “genuine religion” within their own religious beliefs.

However, this dual belonging contained inherent instabilities. It survived for some time not only because of Imaoka’s charisma, but also because of its integration with Seisoku Gakuin, an educational institution (Tōkyō Kiitsu Kyōkai 1993).

The Tōkyō Kiitsu Kyōkai was located on the grounds of Seisoku Gakuin. Imaoka was appointed principal of Seisoku Gakuin in 1925 on the recommendation of Masaharu Anesaki and served for many years in the administration of this institution.

In 1949, Imaoka placed the Free Religion as the basis of education at Seisoku Gakuin. However, he did not prescribe a doctrine of the Free Religion to be taught to students, nor did he teach them about any particular religion. Imaoka believed that if teachers who deepen their understanding of the Free Religion taught each subject, they would naturally impart to their students the genuine religion through their teaching. Imaoka also saw the Tōkyō Kiitsu Kyōkai as an organization that would help teachers to deepen their understanding of the Free Religion (Imaoka 1982: 220-222).

The Tōkyō Kiitsu Kyōkai, where Free Religionists pursued the genuine truth of religion, was barely able to survive amid the various religions and secular educational institutions.

4) Conclusion: Dual belonging makes Belonging to and Believing in the Religion Possible

It is not my intention to criticize Imaoka’s essentialist view of religion as Fundamental Life. Certainly, Imaoka’s understanding of religion was constructed within the context of various religions and religious studies in modern Japanese society. However, once established, the concept of religion produced a substantive church, the Tōkyō Kiitsu Kyōkai, to which Free Religionists could belong while also belonging to the organization of their own religion. Of course, it is difficult to regard Tōkyō Kiitsu Kyōkai as an organization on the same level as other religions, as Imaoka thought. However, the fact that the mystical and pluralistic concept of religion produced a substantive church and realized dual religious belonging will offer a novel perspective for a critical examination of the concept of religion. I am convinced that this dual belonging makes possible Belonging to the Religion and Believing in the Religion.

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