

De l'expérience individuelle du religieux dans la société japonaise contemporaine
— Itinéraires de dévotion sur le circuit du nouveau pèlerinage de Shikoku à Sasaguri (Fukuoka) —
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Individual experience of religious practice in contemporary Japanese society :
Faith routes on a “New Shikoku” pilgrimage trail, Sasaguri, Fukuoka

In this research, I aimed to determine the structural role that religious practice can bear for the individual. I also aimed to show how religious activities could sociabilize a person, and I wanted to nuance the dichotomy between the collective and individual dimensions, in a society which is often thought to be relying on the former. Japanese researches on the subject often tend to emphasize religion in Japan on its collective dimension, especially when describing village and urban ritualities. On the other hand, French anthropologists focus more on the person, somewhat putting aside the social context. This dichotomy can lead to an ethnocentric view of the social phenomenon, opposing a so-called “individualistic” in French or Occidental society and a “collectivist” Japanese one. While religious structures, faiths and practices usually serve as an argument for this point of view, some outstanding researches actually give a different voice. Those researches show us a way to express one's religiosity in a fashion that is usually thought to be “individual” : focus on individual singularity, originality of the belief combinations or independence from the institutions. Those facts can be approached within the examples of historical figures like religious founders, but also with more anonymous popular figures who had and still retain a key role in Japanese religious structures and spaces. These persons could be thought in parallel with the “religious virtuoso” described outside Japan and called “charismatics” by Max Weber, often said to present a form of religiosity relying on personal experience rather than dogma and institutional lead. It is to be noted that on the Japanese side, researches about “charismatic” specialists are especially numerous, and that compared to other aspects of the religious phenomenon in Japanese society, they emphasize on the experience of the specialist rather than its social function. In fact, a lot of researches on the *miko* or *fugeki* specialists present “life histories”. This point of view was developed by Anne Bouchy in her researches on those specialists, focusing especially on the direct experience of possession and their life stories, thus fusing together Japanese and French works on the subject.

Firstly, I aimed to compare the results of these researches with nowadays realities. Secondly, I planned on talking about the religious experiences of people whom little has been told about. Those persons are, for example, non-charismatic and institutional religious professionals, like temple monks 僧侶, or laymen practicing religious austerities and consulting the charismatic specialists 拝み屋さん. The same persons could also engage in pilgrimage activities, in the middle of a process to become a specialist themselves, or, more broadly, in a devotional itinerary.

Finally, in order to analyze the itinerary of these individuals, I picked a few criterias among those defining individuality as it is defined in anthropology and especially by researches contesting the ethnocentric definition of

this concept and focusing on its multiple aspects. In this regard, I centered my analysis around the different ways to express ones' individuality for a person engaging in a religious activity, and especially on the relationship with others in a constant exchange between parties, whether this exchange is felt in a positive or a negative value. I put a special emphasis on the formation of personality brought by the religious activities, constantly evolving, and the internal meaning experienced by the practioner.

This researches was conducted in a meaningful environment : the semi-rural town of Sasaguri, near the big city of Fukuoka in Kyūshū. This town has the particularity to house a pilgrimage route, which is a local replica of the 88 temples of Shikoku. It's a reknowned sacred place in the area, attracting a lot of religious specialists and laymen alike. It has the advantage to present us a broad and representative sample of religious possibilities in contemporary Japanese society : rites temples 祈禱寺, divination, oracles and therapeutic practices and services, austerities 修行, pilgrimages and various other religious practices, as well as local religious structures as parishioner temples 檀家寺, local confraternities 講 or shrine gatherings 宮座 or 氏子.

The first part of this thesis defines the context on its geographical, socio-historical and theoretical settings. The first chapter presents this frame by showing how Sasaguri forms a sacred, dynamic and multi-layered space where various religious practices are displayed by people coming outside the town, but also how representative of a first layer of local religiosity, that I call "first level of religious experience", the town is. This first level has been largely discussed in Japanese researches on its collective dimension, with its normative and institutional structures as confraternities and various local religious groups. Indeed, we remark in this chapter that, at first glance, those local structures emphasize on a rather collective experience of religion. Still, religiosity can not be reduced to its mere collective expression, because participation to local ritualities bears as well a personal meaning, expressed in the individual participation (as for the preparation of religious offerings, to take a concrete example) which also reflects a personal investment from the participants. It was not the place in this thesis to discuss in depths of this matter, which represents a very ambitious subject, but as a general frame it has to be taken into consideration. I go back on this subject in the last chapter of this thesis and actually aim to develop it for further researchs.

The second chapter focuses on the various studies about religious experience in contemporary society, as well as the different suggestions to approach the question of individuality with religion. The massive amount of researches about the Japanese specialists of the oracles, who gather all the different categories and criterias defined in the studies I presented previously, lead me to give a special importance on the subject.

The second part of this thesis explores the various possibilities between on two types of religious specialists. The first type is the so-called "charismatic", represented here with the *ogamiyasan* 拝み屋さん specialist through a few examples, while the latter is the "institutional" one, analysed here through the example of temple monks and nuns. This second part not only serves as a contemporary illustration of those two categories in Sasaguri. It is also the place to discuss them, and to bring a new light on another type of *homo religiosus* : the practioner 行者 standing between the laymen and the religious specialists, who's engaged on a path leading to a religious qualification. The main point of discussion in the first chapter of this second part are the broad differences between people sharing the same religious qualification, the *tokudo* or buddhist consecration, but having a very different status, religious life and background. We start with the case of temple monks, and especially those who run a temple. By analysing their life history, I show that the religious path of an institutional specialist actually can be a

way to define or express a form of individual singularity which finds its support on the model of the family, either biological or symbolical, through master/disciple relationships expressing themselves in a family-based vocabulary. Then we can see that temple monks, already part of an inherited religious identity, link the starting point of their religious life with the need to insert themselves into this family line. In this case, becoming a monk in a monk's family can not be considered as a way to leave one's family behind, as it was often described and actually used to be. For many of our 住職 informants, independence from the family was expressed, on the opposite, in the lay life they had before they embrace a religious career. For this reason their itinerary is close to the "believers lines" as it was put by Danièle Hervieu-Léger, but also to the "converts" type, since those monks needed to re-assert their religious identity and find a new one. On the opposite, for persons whose background were lay families, entering in a religious life also meant to express a brand new identity and could lead to a family crisis. In the case of women, for lay practioners and specialists alike, entering a religious career involves a complete recomposition of the gender identity, whether it means abandoning a form of the feminine identity that is thought to be conflict the religious qualification, the revendication of a new assertive "masculine" identity or an even more "feminine" one.

The fourth chapter focuses on the *ogamiyasan*, starting from previous researchs. We can see here that this type of specialist are still representing an "example by the extraordinary" of the religious life history and direct, personal experience. Their identity is defined by three steps leading a "first alterity" to be accepted by the group in a positive way. As the institutional specialists, a category which they can also belong to, the status of religious professional gives them social and economical support. This situation is to be put in parallel with the lay people whom we discussed in the previous chapter. In fact, most of the *ogamiyasan* started as lay practioners, and their path gave them a space to express themselves and to take distance from their original background and social norms. At last but not least, those specialist's religiosity tends to be effectively personal and intimate, and lead them through a real personality building process.

We can find similarities between the *ogamiyasan* and their consultants' life paths, which are the sujet of our analyze on chapter five. *Ogamiyasan* gather around themselves followers from various backgrounds, having different practices, profiles and expectations. Consulting a specialist to obtain an advice, or to solve a problem when "every other way had proven to be ineffective", they can be of two kind : customers consulting sporadically, who have little to no religious investment, or, on the contrary, experienced religious practitioners engaged in a religious specialist's path and starting to gather followers themselves, while training under their master. We realize that, as it was previously stated in chapter four, the difference between established religious specialists and their followers is less related to their qualifications than their ability to establish themselves economically and to socially valorize their charisma, by gathering around them a network of supporters, followers and disciples. This point allows us to reconsider the use of "charisma" as a key concept to deal with the *ogamiyasan*'s case, since not every one of them is the "charismatic" leader of a group of followers, and that "charisma" can also serve to qualify a temple monk whose religiosity can be described as merely "institutional". Some lay practioners, also, can possess "charisma".

The third and last part of this thesis discuss the individual modalities of the religious practices, *via* the interactions between the internal and external dimensions : those of the practioner, the space is in, or the network which they belong to and which is revolving around them. We focus our analysis on those lay practioners

previously mentioned on the previous chapters. The sixth chapter explore the pilgrimage modalities, as it was stated in various researches that pilgrimage can be considerate as an absolute expression of individual religious practice, a space emphasizing liberty and freeing the pilgrim from the structural norms, as well as a non-obligatory, chosen practice that could lead to “tourism” and play. Yet, it was also an ascetic practice, and could have been also a “rite of passage” for some communities in special contexts for age groups and social groups, as we see with the example of the Ise confraternities 伊勢講, and even, as a normative apparel. Pilgrimage can be accomplished in group or individually, but it’s still the former that the most commonly encountered. In this chapter, we follow the paths of several pilgrims, who had accomplished pilgrimage in both collective and individual forms. It is interesting to note at this rate that their religious history follow the main key points than those of the religious specialists and the other lay practioners : a starting situation considered by themselves as insatisfactory, a “biographical crisis” that triggered an urgent need for a new situation, the meeting with a key person that bears a special signification, the search for answers and models in the past family history or the immediate social environment, an active process of building a religious persona and the revendication of this persona which is displayed and confronted to the social and religious environment. Through those pilgrims’ examples, we see that religious practice, whether in group or individually, can lead to a self distanciation from the institutional norms which expresses itself at a purely individual level. Also, this reflexive consideration does not necessary mean a strict and direct opposition, but rather a pragmatic use of one’s agency through already existing social ressources.

The last chapter, finally, plunges into a deep and detailed analysis of a religious modality that is fundamental to every modalities explored previously, from the most customary to the most extraordinary : the devotional aspect of the cult, i.e the relationship of a person with an object of worship. Devotions towards a statue or another object, that are made visible during collective ritualities as well, are also linked to a personal story at the individual level. Furthermore, they are accompanied by practices often viewed as common because they are accomplished by many people every day, as the offerings’ preparation, cleaning, donations, prayers etc. To this practices is corresponding an intimate experience and intentionality that I tried to analyze in this chapter. This intimate experience reveals a building of the personality and its acknowledgment through religious practice, and this process is also built through an individualization of the object of worship and a strong affective investment in it. I conclude by saying that this process, that we can find in every other form of religious practice, represents a fundamental that is sufficient to prove the important part played by individual and personal aspect in Japanese religious practices as well.

This thesis focused on religious modalities that are rather well followed in Japanese contemporary society, showing that they are still significant and meaningful nowadays. Still, those modalities are still a little above a continuum of practices that serves as its base and support. The informants whose stories are presented in this research are themselves situated between the religious specialist and the lay practioner/follower, the ordinary and the extraordinary figure : they represent a various sample of religious actors that can be met in Sasaguri, a town where religiosity is thicker than the average town. It would be interesting to spare a further research on the study of everyday and annual ritualities of ordinary persons corresponding to what I called “first level of religious experience”, as the daily care of the domestic altar 仏壇, the participation to the local sanctuary ritualities, etc, as I stated earlier in this work. This point still need further developments.