

Geography of Religion in Japan since 1977

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I. Introduction: Geography of Religion and Historical Geography

This paper makes an attempt to review the recent progress in Japanese geography of religion, by analyzing the bibliography on religious studies by Japanese geographers since 1977. Before going on to the main subject, the relation between geography of religion and historical geography is discussed.

Geographical studies of religion have become prolific recently. Although I do not know of the situation in the United Kingdom, in the United States a Specialty Group of Geography of Religions and Belief Systems was established in the Association of American Geographers about 1991, and continues to be active. In Germany, too, there are two study groups concerning the geography of religion in the nationwide academic society.¹⁾

According to my scarce experience and impression, however, I think their activity seems to have less contact with historical geographers than expected, although some of the contents of the studies are historical geography. A good example is a book of Dr. John Gay. He wrote a book entitled *The Geography of Religion in England* in 1971. It is a study on the geographical patterns of denominations like Anglicans and Roman Catholics, especially attaching considerable significance to the 1851 Census. In that sense, it is also a book of historical geography.

On the other hand, for historical geography, religion has not been a major theme. For example, in 1993, Prof. Butlin published a book entitled *Historical Geography*, which is a comprehensive review of the history of historical geography. However, unhappily, we can find no such words as "religion," "sacred," nor "pilgrimage" in the index. As historical geography deals with a wide range of phenomena, like settlement, city, agriculture and so on, compared with them, perhaps religion cannot occupy an important position in historical geography.

In short, we could say as follows: religion may not be a big subject for historical geography, but the historico-geographical aspect is important for the geography of religion. In fact, geographical studies of religion in Japan have often been historical geography at the same time.

II. Method and Material

When we review a certain realm of study, it is common to take up some books and articles concerning the main subjects or tendencies which the reviewer regards as important, next to introduce the contents and to give some comments. The selection of the subjects or tendencies depends on the reviewer. However, we could doubt if the main trend is all included. Some important themes may have been neglected carelessly or on purpose.

In this paper, I take another approach. Firstly, I make a bibliography concerning religious studies by Japanese geographers. Secondly, the bibliography is analyzed quantitatively, although just as an elementary statistical analysis using calculator.

The material for making a bibliography is *Bibliography in Geography* edited by the Human Geographical Society of Japan. It has been published every five years since 1953. Each volume records the geographical literature published in Japan for five years just before compiling the bibliography. For example, Vol. 10 published in 1998 consists of the geographical literature published between 1992 and 1996; Vol. 9 includes the literature between 1987 and 1991. The literature written by foreigners is also included, when it appears in a Japanese journal, but the books and articles published overseas cannot be included in the bibliography, even if they are written by Japanese authors.

The classification in *Bibliography in Geography* is shown in Table 1. The classification differs a little from volume to volume. It is the latest ones, Vol. 9 and 10, that are shown here. There are 32 categories in all, from physical geography to

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Table 1. Classification in *Bibliography in Geography*, Vol. 9 & 10

| |
|-------------------------------------|
| 1. General |
| 2. History of geography |
| 3. Maps & old maps |
| 4. Geomorphology |
| 5. Climate |
| 6. Hydrology |
| 7. Other physical geography |
| 8. Disaster |
| 9. Environmental problems |
| 10. Population |
| 11. rural areas |
| 12. Urban areas |
| 13. Economic geography |
| 14. Agriculture |
| 15. Stock farming |
| 16. Forestry |
| 17. Fishery |
| 18. Resources & mining |
| 19. Industry |
| 20. Regional planning & development |
| 21. Commerce, trade & finance |
| 22. Transportation |
| 23. Tourism |
| 24. Political |
| 25. Social |
| 26. Cultural |
| 27. Perception & behavior |
| 28. Historical geography |
| 29. Place names |
| 30. Regional geography |
| 31. Geographical education |
| 32. Travel notes & essays |

human geography. It is mainly cultural geography and historical geography that are concerned with the geography of religion, which is referred to later again.

It would be desirable to consult the all volumes from Vol. 1 to Vol. 10, but owing to the constraints of time, in this paper only the latest Vol. 7 to Vol. 10 are taken up and analyzed.

The amount of geographical literature related to religion, which is selected from the *Bibliography*, is as follows; 45 articles and books are from Vol. 7, 52 are from Vol. 8, 61 from Vol. 9, and 58 from Vol. 10. Most of the literature is not books, but articles. We can find some increase in the amount of the literature in recent years.

The selection cannot help being subjective to some extent. I made two criteria. First, the literature written by non-geographers such as anthropologists and historians is excluded, even if they focus on the geographical aspect of religion. The judgement as to whether the author is a

geographer or not, is up to his/her career. Second, nevertheless, the literature on religion written by non-geographers is included, when they appear in a geographical journal. However, these cases are few.

As a result of this procedure, 216 geographical articles and books related to religion are extracted from *Bibliography in Geography* Vol.7 to 10. This list consisting of 216 items becomes the basis of the following analysis.

III. Analysis of the Bibliography

1. Category

The first part of the analysis is category in *Bibliography in Geography*. As mentioned earlier, *Bibliography* is divided into about 30 categories. Table 2 shows, under which category the geographical literature related to religion falls. Summing up, about 45% of the literature is classified into historical geography and about 37% is cultural geography. Except for the period between 1982 and 1986, the number of items classified into historical geography is greater than that of cultural geography. We can find historico-geographical studies even in the literature classified into cultural geography and others. Therefore, more than half of the study related to religion can be located in historical geography.

Mention should be made of the number in the table. The number of the items of literature is not the whole number, but it has decimal fractions like twenty point eight. It is because some items extending over multiple fields are recorded in two or three categories at the same time. In such cases, the number of the item is counted as a half or one third.

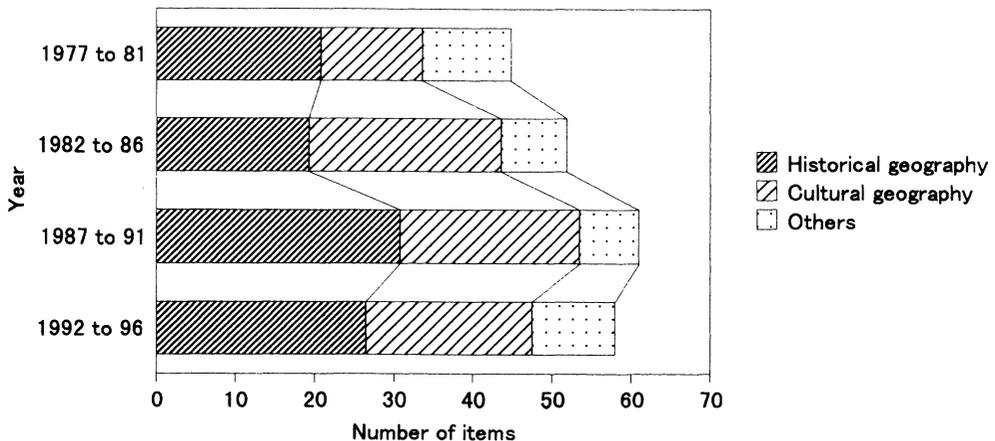
Figure 1 shows the same thing as Table 2. This graph is made of the numbers of the Table. Historical geography was found to be more than cultural geography, and the number of items related to religion is increasing as well.

2. Study area

Secondly, the analysis goes on to the study area, Table 3. As is the case in Japanese historical geography in general, much of the literature related to religion takes the inland area as a study field. In total, the rate reaches almost 90%. Against the domestic area, we can see only 22 items studying foreign countries for the past twenty years. Figure 2 gives the same impression, although we may notice some increase of the study of foreign countries.

Table 2. Geographical literature related to religion by category in *Bibliography in Geography*

| Category | 1977-81 | 82-86 | 87-91 | 92-96 | Total |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Historical geography | 20.8 (46.3) | 19.3 (37.2) | 30.8 (50.5) | 26.5 (45.7) | 97.5 (45.1%) |
| Cultural geography | 12.5 (28.5) | 24.3 (46.8) | 22.7 (37.2) | 21.0 (36.2) | 80.8 (37.4) |
| Others | 11.3 (25.2) | 8.3 (16.0) | 7.5 (12.3) | 10.5 (18.1) | 37.7 (17.4) |
| Total | 45.0 (100.0) | 52.0 (100.0) | 61.0 (100.0) | 58.0 (100.0) | 216.0 (100.0) |


Figure 1. Geographical literature related to religion by category

The foreign areas picked up by Japanese geographers include the United States, Canada, Germany, Israel (Holy Land), South Pacific and India. Studies concerning the United States are particularly numerous, amounting to 11, half of the foreign studies. However, 9 of the American studies are made by the same person, Dr. Nakagawa. He has researched the cemetery landscape in Louisiana in detail.

Among these 22 items there is one translation of a German book, *Religionsgeographie*, which is a reading in geography of religion published in 1975.

As another theme related to the study area, there are data on the language used in the geographical literature. The number of the items written in non-Japanese is only 4 of the total 216, which may illustrate the lack of international influence of Japanese geography. Three of the 4 are written in English, and the fourth is written in German. However, there are a couple of papers in non-Japanese, which are not contained in the research material, *Bibliography in Geography*.

3. Birth year of the author

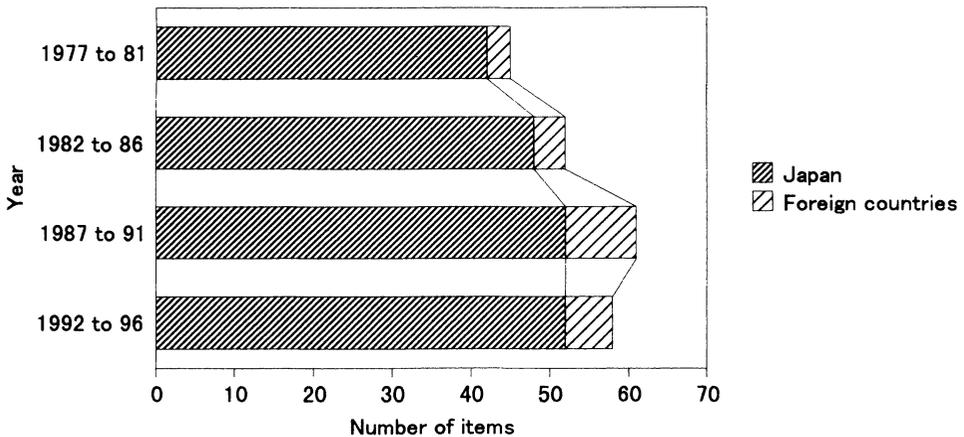
Thirdly, the generation of the author is analyzed. The birth year of the author is made clear, mainly by consulting directories of some geographical societies. Although there are some persons whose birth year is not known, we could obtain data as to more than 90% of the authors.

The summary in Table 4 shows a very interesting characteristic. It is in the 1950s and 1960s that many were eager to write papers concerning religion. The generation born after 1970 is also becoming active. The rate of these three generations exceeds 80% in 1992 to 1996. It is surprising that the 1930s and 1940s immediately before the vigorous generations hardly write papers. It is unlikely that they are too old, because the 1920s write more papers. Figure 3 shows the same thing. We can reconfirm the increase of literature written by researchers born after 1950.

How should we interpret these phenomena? First, we may consider that geographical study of religion becomes popular among younger generations. Further, the appearance of the researchers

Table 3. Geographical literature related to religion by study area

| Study area | 1977-81 | 82-86 | 87-91 | 92-96 | Total |
|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Japan | 42 (93.3) | 48 (92.3) | 52 (85.2) | 52 (89.7) | 194 (89.8%) |
| Foreign countries | 3 (6.7) | 4 (7.7) | 9 (14.8) | 6 (10.3) | 22 (10.2) |
| Total | 45 (100.0) | 52 (100.0) | 61 (100.0) | 58 (100.0) | 216 (100.0) |

**Figure 2. Geographical literature related to religion by study area**

specializing in geography of religion contributes to the increase of the literature, which is mentioned later.

Second, as for the lack of 1930s and 1940s, it is likely that persons who may have written this kind of literature have gone into the field of cultural anthropology. In fact, some anthropologists in these generations graduated from the geography department at universities.

4. Author

The fourth area of the analysis is the individual author. 216 articles and books extracted from *Bibliography in Geography* are written by 103 authors in all. That is to say, one person writes 2.1 items on average. However, there are some researchers who write many papers, such as Sekiguchi, T. Tanaka, Nagano, Oda, Nakagawa, Iwahana and so on, as shown in Figure 4. They are specializing in geography of religion and contribute to the increase of the geographical literature relating to religion. Between 1977 and 1981 about 29% of the literature is written by the top five authors, in the meanwhile between 1992 and 1996 the rate grows to about 43%, which means

that some specialists have come to produce many papers.

5. Research subject

The last point of analysis is the research subject. Although the statistical data cannot be shown here, it could be pointed out that popular research subjects in recent years include mountain religion, pilgrimage, religious towns and settlements, religious organization in villages, cemetery and so on. Above all, mountain religion and pilgrimage attract geographers' concerns recently.

There were some geographers' names in Figure 4, whose specialties are as follows; Nagano, Oda and Iwahana are involved in the study of mountain religion. T. Tanaka is a specialist in pilgrimage, in which Iwahana and Oda are also interested. Nakagawa has researched the cemetery as mentioned earlier, while Sekiguchi wrote many papers on the unification of Shintoistic shrines.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Before concluding the paper, I would like to

Table 4. Geographical literature related to religion by birth year of the author

| Birth year | 1977-1981 | 1982-1986 | 1987-1991 | 1992-1996 |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Before 1909 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 1 |
| 1910 to 1919 | 5.5 | 4.5 | 2 | 1 |
| 1920 to 1929 | 6 | 11 | 8.5 | 5 |
| 1930 to 1939 | 6.5 | 2.5 | 1 | 1 |
| 1940 to 1949 | 3.3 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| 1950 to 1959 | 13.2 | 18.5 | 35.5 | 20.5 |
| 1960 to 1969 | 0 | 2.5 | 12.5 | 22 |
| After 1970 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Unknown | 7.5 | 4 | 1.5 | 0.5 |
| Total | 45 | 52 | 61 | 58 |

Note: When the item is written by more than one person, the number is counted as a half or one third for each author.

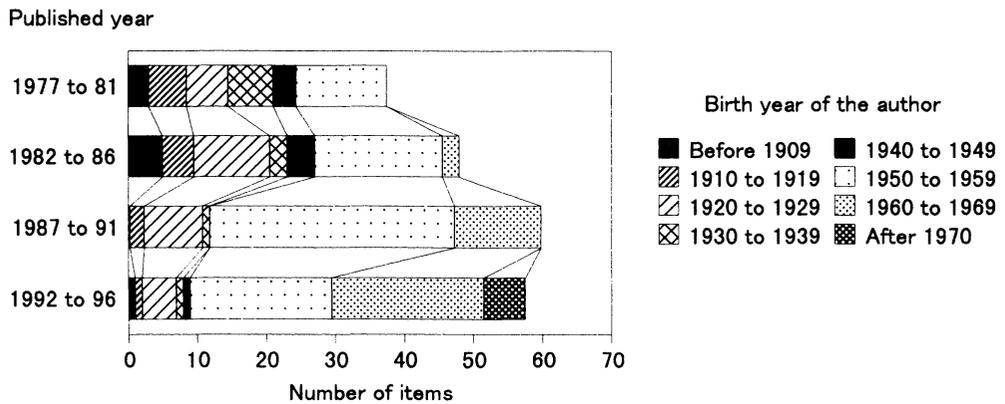


Figure 3. Geographical literature related to religion by birth year of the author

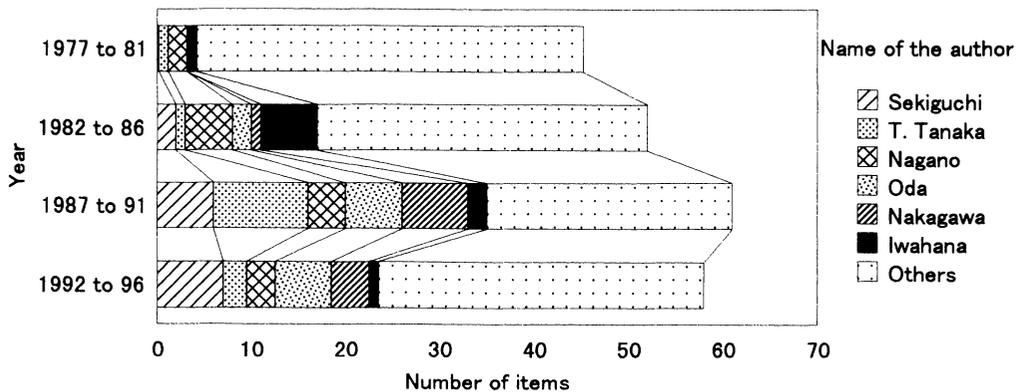


Figure 4. Geographical literature related to religion by author

refer to the two problems to be solved. One is the examination of the bibliography before 1976, so that trends in the geography of religion since the Second World War will become clear. The other problem lies in *Bibliography in Geography* as a research material. The criteria of the collection of geographical literature in *Bibliography* changes a little volume by volume. Without taking this problem into consideration, we could not conduct a precise discussion.

Notes

This is originally a paper prepared for the tenth International Conference of Historical Geographers held in Coleraine, Belfast and Maynooth in Ireland from 19th to 28th July 1998. To be exact, the paper was read in Belfast on 25th July. The original title was "Contributions of Historical Geographers to the Study of Religion in Japan," as it appears on the programme and abstracts. It is because this paper was read in front of historical geographers why it pays much attention to historical geography especially in the first chap-

ter. In order to publish the paper in this journal, some change were made in the wording.

- 1) There are *Arbeitskreis Geographie der Geisteshaltung und Religion* and *Arbeitskreis Religionsgeographie* in *Zentralverband der deutschen Geographen*, according to *Geographisches Taschenbuch 1997/1998*.

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