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### Review: Steven Heine, *Sacred High City, Sacred Low City: A Tale of Religious Sites in Two Tokyo Neighborhoods* (Oxford, 2011).

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Review of Steven Heine, *Sacred High City, Sacred Low City: A Tale of Religious Sites in Two Tokyo Neighborhoods* (Oxford, 2012), published in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48 (2012) 1: 141–142.

This short book provides a sociological analysis of two distinctive areas in metropolitan Tokyo: Akasaka, which represents the affluent “High City,” and Inarichō, which stands for the *shitamachi* or “Low City.” Heine’s primary task is to nuance the argument made by Ian Reader and George Tanabe in their now-classic *Practically Religious* (1998); i.e., that Japanese religions are best understood as providing “this worldly benefits” (Jp. *genze riyaku*). By analyzing a number of practices related to significant life events, including education, career advancement, travel, marriage, child-bearing and death, Heine argues that, in fact, contemporary Japanese religiosity evinces a concern for benefits that are “this-worldly” but often “impractical” (*genze hi-ryaku*), framing his argument around the ideal of *anshin* or “peace of mind.” Heine also points out that, in spite of the common phrase that all Japanese are “born Shinto and die Buddhist,” the prevalence of the cult of Inari, which represents a form of folk religiosity that does not fit easily into either category, requires us to add a third dimension: “Live Inari.” Finally, the book fatally undermines the idea—held by many Japanese—that contemporary Japanese are “irreligious.” Though religious practices in contemporary Japan may be diffused and diverse, they are nonetheless deeply imbricated in the daily lives (and deaths) of the majority of the population.

This book is a departure for Heine, a scholar known for his pioneering work on medieval Japanese Zen thought (especially Dōgen) and Zen practice (the *kōan*). Though grounded in solid scholarship, *Sacred High City* has an unmistakably anecdotal and even autobiographical flavor. On the one hand, this makes it highly engaging, and accessible to the non-specialist; on the other, the structure of the work is loose and the book ends abruptly, without a proper conclusion. That aside, this is a significant contribution to the study of contemporary Japanese religiosity—particularly but not exclusively urban religiosity—and a book that should be read alongside Tanabe and Reader’s *Practically Religious*. Particularly useful is Heine’s succinct critical analysis of the four common paradigms employed in recent studies of Japanese religiosity (24–26). In short, *Sacred High City* is a must read for anyone with an interest in Japanese religions, sociology of religion, ritual spaces, or religion and modernization.

**Brief annotation:** A sociological analysis of two distinctive areas in metropolitan Tokyo: Akasaka (High City) and Inarichō (Low City). Argues that contemporary Japanese religiosity evinces a concern for benefits that are “this-worldly” but often “impractical” (*genze hi-ryaku*), and highlights the prevalence of the cult of Inari to contemporary urban Japanese religiosity.

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