Book Review
Jews and Judaism by Hiroshi Ichikawa (Iwanami Shoten, 2019)

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This book summarizes 40 years of work by its author, Professor Hiroshi Ichikawa. It also presents findings from the discovery of 1st-century synagogue ruins in the region of Galilee, made in the summer of 2016 in the course of archeological excavations in Israel that Ichikawa has joined for 30 years. In the 1980s, the assertion of his Israeli teacher that "Japan's prosperity will not last long," struck a chord with him and made him realize how the Jews, who were forced to live in pagan lands, keenly observed the societies they lived in and prepared themselves for the adversities that awaited them. From this, he surmised that "Maybe we can learn something from the Jews in figuring out our own future, because they had become stronger by recognizing their weaknesses, and had victoriously lived through many harsh realities" (p. ii). He wrote this book in the hope that the modern generation could gain inspiration about living from the lives of the Jews.

This book begins with an introductory chapter on "who is a Jew?" followed by four chapters taking up Jewish history, faith, studies, and society. The author provides a comprehensive discussion on the life of the Jews and on Judaism itself from these four perspectives. The introductory chapter defines who the Jews are. The word "Jews" is "*Yehudi*" in Hebrew, which is referred to the people of the tribe of Judah from the latter half of the period of Solomon's Temple until that of the Second Temple, or to the people living in the land of Judah as recounted in the Bible. After the medieval period, "Jews" came to be clearly defined as "people born of a Jewish mother, or converts to Judaism" based on Jewish Law (*Halakha*) (p. 5). Modern Israel enacted the Law of Return in 1950 to give Jews the right to come and live in Israel and to gain Israeli citizenship, provided they are officially recognized as Jews. The then Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion forged an agreement with Orthodox Jews to set the criteria for granting citizenship. According to these criteria, a true Jew is a person who was born and raised in a society that follows the Jewish divine law or, in the words of the author, "a Jew is a person who submits to Rabbinic authority and lives by the teachings of the Talmud (commentaries on the

scriptures of Judaism)" (p. 6). In other words, even a person who believes that he/she is a Jew may not qualify as a "Jew" according to Israel's criteria. As an example, the author mentions the case of immigrants from Ethiopia who had intermittently migrated to Israel since before its founding until the 1980s, when they caught the attention of Israeli authorities. Since they did not have rabbis and did not practice Talmudic teachings, it was believed that some of them were *mamzers*, or children born from a marriage that is against divine law. Orthodox Jews (i.e., the Israeli Rabbinate) imposed upon the Ethiopian Jewish immigrants orthodox conversion rituals followed by baptism by immersion (*tevillah*), this treatment attracted criticism and became a political problem. Consequently, the controversy compelled the Israeli government to simply apply the Law of Return to them. Nevertheless, the more than 100,000 Ethiopian immigrants living in Israel today are still required to undergo baptism by immersion when they marry (pp. 7–8). Although Orthodox Judaism has no authority over marriage relationships among the Diaspora Jews, they are subjected to marital investigations as part of the process of obtaining Israeli citizenship.

In Section 1 (Ancient Jews) of Chapter 1 (From the Point of View of History), Ichikawa emphasizes the need to dispel misconceptions about Jewish history, particularly historical views centered on Western European Christianity. Most prominently, these predictable shibboleths include "the ancient Jews believed that, as the chosen people, they are the only ones that are going to be saved after the Babylonian captivity, which led to the establishment of Judaism as a closed and self-centered religion"; "for 500 years after that, Judaism became a religion that was exclusive and focused on formal laws"; and "when Christianity was born as a world religion after Jesus of Nazareth appeared and taught about repentance and love of neighbor, Judaism was removed from the stage of history" (p. 10). Rabbis appeared in Jewish society after it was devastated by two wars with the Roman Empire in the early years of the Common Era. The rabbis were not priests but rather teachers of the law who were experts on God's teachings and gave wise advice on a new way of life to the Jews, who were driven from their motherland. The rabbis adopted the words of the prophet Amos (8:11-12) to interpret their own situation and gathered the teachings of their ancestors to study them deeply. They aimed to satisfy the thirst for God's word, eventually becoming the leaders of Jewish society and exercising influence even today. The author, however, felt it odd that that the appearance of these learned men (rabbinic sages) coincided with the classical period of Roman law (p. 12). It was during the time of Emperor Caracalla when Roman citizenship was granted to all free men throughout the Roman Empire, which was the same period that Mishnah, a law peculiar to the Jews, was established. The rabbis deeply involved in compiling the laws

were referred to as *tannaim* (repeaters or teachers of Mishnah), and they were later known as *amoraim* (interpreters) after the Mishnah was established. Since then, Judaism acquired a distinct religious law system, and Jewish society was reconstructed as a self-governing body with an established conversion system, eventually spreading throughout Palestine, Babylonia, and the surrounding areas. During this period, Christianity became the state religion of Rome in the west, while Zoroastrianism gained ground in the Sasanian Empire in the east. Later on, when the system of self-government for the Jews was abolished and the oppression of Jews grew stronger, the Talmud was compiled and adopted as the foundation unifying the Jewish community in Palestine around year 400 and in Babylonia around year 500. In particular, the Babylonian Talmud became established as a more complete compilation of divine law through a unique compilation method used at two schools (*yeshivas*). Since the Islamic forces that destroyed the Sasanian Empire inherited this traditional arrangement, the divine law that started in Judaism spread from the Middle East to North Africa and on to Spain, greatly contributing to the survival and prosperity of Medieval Jews (p. 15). In Section 2 (From the Islamic world to Europe), the author defines the appearance of Islam as marking the beginning of the medieval period, which he describes as the period when learning and trade first flourished in Babylonia. Since the study of law based on the Arabic language was central to the Islamic world, this environment also provided an opportunity for the further development of the study of Jewish law. In particular, this happened through the *yeshivas* (Sura and Pumbedita) established during the time of the Abbasid Caliphate and through the development of philosophy, science, medicine, and linguistics engendered by the study of law in Spain during the time of the Caliphate of Cordoba. The learned Jews during these periods used Arabic, the official language, as an everyday language and acquired new Islamic disciples of their scholarship, while criticizing learning based solely on adherence to Jewish traditions. This period of history produced the likes of Maimonides, a Jewish proponent of learning Islamic philosophy and medicine; Abraham Ibn Ezra, a distinguished Jewish biblical commentator; and Judah Halevi, a Jewish philosopher and poet famous for the Kuzari; these leading Jewish intellectuals were the contemporaries of Ibn Rushd, Zhu Xi, Dōgen Zenji, and Thomas Aquinas. It was a period of remarkable progress in scholarship around the world (p. 17). Although Jews were regarded with contempt even in the Islamic world, they acquired the status of *Dhimmi* (protected people) as People of the Book, forming their own *Ummah* (religious community) by respecting Islam and paying the poll and land taxes. Consequently, they enjoyed protection of their life, property, freedom of movement and trade. According to the author, this put the Jews, a people of commerce, in

a favorable situation and enabled them to expand the network of Jewish society through trade and marriage relationships. Proof of this period's prosperity in Jewish society can be found in the massive volumes of religious and economic manuscripts discovered in the Cairo *Genizah* (synagogue storage) used at the end of the 19th century (p. 21). Judaism went through a rare golden age in its history in Spain, and from the 9th to 10th centuries, Jewish communities flourished beyond the Alps to Speyer, Worms, and Mainz (p. 25). After the Sephardi Jews were expelled in 1492 through the Christian Reconquista, they moved and settled in the Balkan region, which was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. There they became prominent as doctors, traders, and investors. During this period, Jewish rabbis and mystics expelled from Spain gathered in the city of Safed (or Zehat) in Palestine and formed a base for the study of *Kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism). Furthermore, the city-state of Venice, which tolerated religion as a practical means for governance, became a place of refuge for Jews and the site of the world's first Jewish ghetto in 1516, where Jews were made to live separately from other members of society (pp. 27–30). Meanwhile, with worsening riots and atrocities in the West European Christian world, which was also aggravated by the plague, the Ashkenazi Jews escaped to Poland, which granted Jews the freedom to live and practice their religion under the Statute of Kalisz in 1264. This statute was issued by the Polish monarchy, after suffering major defeats in the Mongolian Invasion, as a way to encourage immigrants to move in from Germany and help with the country's reconstruction. In particular, Poland had great expectations of the Jews because of their excellent skills in trade and coinage (p. 33). According to the author, the rise and fall of world empires coincide with the migration of the Jews; namely, the prosperous times in the history of the Babylonian Empire, the Abbasid Caliphate, Spain, the Ottoman Empire, the Netherlands, and even modern America are periods when Jews lived peacefully and contributed significantly to society (pp. 48–49). In today's 21st century, the Jews are no longer the Wandering People of pre-modern times, and neither are they the Chosen People nor a despised people, for that matter. At the end of the chapter, the author, noting that there are now many different sects within Judaism (p. 50), asserts that being a Jew today has simply become a choice. Also, with non-Jewish persons now permitted to become Jews through the conversion system for non-Jews, this choice will lead to many different future possibilities.

Chapter 2 (From the Point of View of Faith) talks in detail about the rituals of the Jewish religion. Section 1 (Rabbinic Judaism) begins with the question of whether Judaism is actually a religion. Ichikawa explains that the English word "religion" points to elements such as a system of doctrines that include monotheistic faith and a world view,

a system of rituals defining acts of worship, and a distinct body of believers, generally based on Christianity as the standard; furthermore, he contends that Judaism, like Shintoism in Japan, does not properly fit into this definition (p. 54). First of all, there is no word in the Hebrew vocabulary that corresponds to the word "religion." Although the word "Dat" is currently being used, for convenience, to refer to religion, the word originally meant a "legal system or legal order" equivalent to Dharma in ancient India, and use of the word goes back to the time of the Babylonian captivity (p. 55). When the Jews later encountered the Greek culture, they adopted the Greek word "*iodaismós*" used in 2 Maccabees of the Septuagint to create a general term for their spiritual culture, which we now refer to as "Judaism" (p. 56). The author warns that Judaism should not be confused with the Hebraism referred to in the Christian world, since the latter points to the monotheistic faith traced back to Abraham, before the Law of Moses was given, and is believed to have spread to Christianity through the prophets (p. 57). Later on, the Judaism that started with the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. became generally referred to as Rabbinic Judaism, which, according to the author, is the "surviving Judaism." One of the indicators of the establishment of Rabbinic Judaism is the existence of the Mishnah, a written collection of the oral laws consisting of a total of 6 orders and 63 tractates and compiled in 200 C.E. under the authority of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi. The Mishnah includes not only religious standards but also stipulations about family law and criminal punishment, court trial provisions, and similar matters. In particular, the development of laws on the "elements of productivity" pertaining to lands and houses is in sharp contrast to the secular laws of the Roman Empire established during the same period. From this, the author metaphorically refers to the Mishnah as a "portable nation" run by the rabbis, in which it was possible to sustain Jewish society anywhere in the world, as long as the Mishnah was being followed (pp. 58–62). Since Mishnah, which means "repeated teachings," represents the Oral Torah, it is written in a concise format that is easy to memorize. It is believed that the Oral Torah has been passed on from Moses to Joshua, to the elders, prophets, and the assembly, and eventually to the rabbis, the Jewish sages. It is divided into the *Halakah*, which deals with laws, and the *Aggadah*, which deals with the non-legalistic aspects such as theology, ethics, biographies, and biblical commentaries. The works related to codified laws and commentaries of the Bible, among other writings, are referred to as the *Midrash*. The rabbis selected Hebrew to be the language of the people and separated the Old Testament Apocrypha, which became established in Jewish society during the Hellenistic period, from the biblical canon and thus chose a way of life for the Jews separate from Greek culture. The rabbis did not leave

behind any personal works, such as those by Philo, Josephus, and other authors who used their own names, because they believed fastidiously that studying the teachings of God is the most important work of man, denying even the use of their own names (p. 64). Although Judaism includes areas under the control of the divine law beyond having faith in God, it does not include areas of secular law as Christianity does. The Torah includes a total of 613 commandments, which one theory explains as being the total of the 248 positive commandments corresponding to the number of bones in the human body and the 365 negative commandments corresponding to the number of days in the solar year. Another theory says that 613 is the total numerical value of the word "Torah" in *Gematria* (Jewish alphanumeric code), which is 611, plus the first 2 commandments that God spoke directly to the people (pp. 72–73).

Sections 1 and 2 of Chapter 3 (As a discipline of study) highlights how Talmudic Torah, or the study of the Torah, flourished through the *yeshivas* (literally, to sit) beginning around 200 C.E. The Babylonian Talmud counts pages of text written in Hebrew characters using even numbers and includes the Mishnah and the *Gemara* (record of rabbinic discussions and interpretations) at the center of the page, Rashi's (medieval Talmud scholar) commentary in the inner margin, and the *Tosafot* (additional commentaries by scholars of the generation of Rashi's grandsons) in the outer margin. The complete volume of the Mishnah was first printed in the 16th century in Venice, and this edition later became the standard for the printed Talmud (pp. 94–99). In other words, the Talmud is actually a commentary for Mishnah, the Oral Torah, which can be traced back to Moses on Mt. Sinai, and this means that all answers to new questions asked by later disciples to their teachers have already been given by God through Moses. Accordingly, the approach they used to deal with new discoveries was to refer to Moses as the final authority (p. 107). Section 3 (Jewish philosophy) highlights how the Arabic-speaking Jews during the Abbasid Caliphate gave birth to Jewish philosophy by going beyond the study of the Talmud and combining the study of Jewish law with Greek philosophy, logic, linguistics, astronomy, medicine, and other Greek disciplines, which were translated into Arabic by Christians in Syria and were gaining wide acceptance at that time. Jewish philosophy during the Islamic period is divided into the Jewish *Kalam*, which was practiced by Saadia Gaon, and the *Falsafa*, which was practiced by Maimonides. Maimonides set out to establish a systematized code for the teachings passed on from Moses by the prophets to the rabbis, the result of which is the 14-volume Mishnah Torah (1178), which became known by the audacious name "Second Torah." According to Maimonides, every human being must attain complete spiritual and physical perfection by practicing the teachings of God

through the commandments, and he argued that the purpose and basis of the commandments can be known through philosophical contemplation (p. 115). He wrote the philosophical work entitled "Guide for the Perplexed" (1185) for the intellectuals who encountered doubts in their faith during philosophical contemplation, arguing that it is necessary in learning the above Greek disciplines to be able to correctly understand God's written revelations and to have a correct understanding of God. Jewish philosophy reached its peak with the works of Maimonides and declined after him, with Hasdai Crescas in the 14th century as the only prominent Jewish philosopher after Maimonides. Replacing the study of philosophy was *Kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism), which dwelt on metaphysical contemplation such as that about creation and the existence of evil. It should be noted that while Arabic was used in Jewish philosophy, Hebrew and Aramaic were used for *Kabbalah* (p. 117). Section 4 (Inquiry into the Jewish mind) explains how the foundations of today's Judaism were built by Orthodox Jews who made radical reforms to the study of traditions in 19th century Lithuania, a community that had refused to embrace modernization and was buried in tradition. These reforms led to of the rise of the new schools of thought in Jewish Enlightenment and Hasidism. This movement was led by the Gaon of Vilna (now Vilnius), Rabbi Elijah Ben Solomon, and his disciple, Rabbi Chaim Volozhin. Rabbi Elijah studied the Talmud deeply to gain new meaning from it because he wanted the students of the law to go back to the Talmud without becoming entangled in discussions or swayed by the authority of extremely refined interpretations of the law propagated since the time of Maimonides (p. 122).

Section 1 (Economic activities of the Jews) of Chapter 4 (As a Society) explains the history of how the Jews, who were not inherently skillful in business, unlike the Phoenicians and Arabs, acquired knowhow in the fields of commerce and finance (pp. 134–144). Section 2 (Purpose in life for the Jews) highlights the teachings of Rabbinic Judaism that provided the Jews with purpose in life and courage, although they had lived in anxiety as outsiders at the bottom of society. As an example, the rabbis believed that since all of humanity descended from Noah, they were bound by the Seven Laws of Noah, as a covenant with the human race established before Mt. Sinai. Also, the "Eight levels of charity" in the 10th Book of the Mishnah Torah defines eight types of giving, such as lending without interest and consideration for the poor (pp. 145–149). Section 3 (Modern messianic theories) highlights two messianic theories that came about in modern times: the universalistic messianic theory, based on the ideals of cosmopolitanism and granting citizenship to Jews, and the individualistic messianic theory, related to the nationalism that brought about the establishment of the Jewish nation of Israel. As of 2018, half of all

Jews in the world (approximately 6.5 million) live in Israel, and almost 80% of the remaining half live in North America, where the Jewish population is divided almost equally into the cosmopolitans and the nationalists (p. 150). The cosmopolitans believe that the Jews, as citizens of the world and having no particular motherland, have the mission to contribute to the prosperity of the human race. This view embodies the teachings of the prophets calling upon the Jews to lead the people as models for justice and love. The nationalists, on the other hand, uphold Zionism and aim to gain the natural rights given to all peoples and thus to establish an economically independent nation-state with its own territory and capability to defend itself, adopting Hebrew as its common language (p. 154). Section 4 (Realization of Jewish society) discusses some basic modern controversies: the revival of the use of Hebrew—which previously had been used only for the Torah and worship as a sacred language in the dispersed Jewish societies—as an everyday language in modern Jewish society (pp. 160–162), the intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, the difficulty in defining what constitutes being a Jew amidst the diversification of Jewish sects in America, and the reality of the fragmentation of Israeli society into secular and ultra-orthodox sects (pp. 165–169).

Ichikawa made the stark realization that only after he finished writing his book did he develop his own personal theories about *Jews and Judaism*. This book has been widely read, as remarked by other reviewers. It is an excellent survey that comprehensively covers basic information on its subject: *Jews and Judaism*. This is due to the author's attempt to write in a "drastically simple and conceptual manner" (p. 187), since the book is published as a paperback pocket edition. At the same time, the book also offers many new insights and a clearer understanding of many issues, even for those engaged in specialized research on Jewish studies. Therefore, this book would no doubt provide a significant learning experience to anyone interested in knowing more about *Jews and Judaism*.