

Peter NOSCO, *Remembering Paradise: Nativism and Nostalgia in Eighteenth Century Japan*. Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series: No. 31. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990. xiv + 271 pp. Bibliography, index. Cloth \$27.00; ISBN 0-674-76007-7.

Peter Nosco's book breaks new and important ground in the field of Shinto studies in the West. It is a valuable contribution to our understanding of a century-long movement promoting the restoration of Shinto thought in Japan. Concentrating on the major eighteenth-century nativists, or National Learning scholars (*kokugakusha*), Nosco outlines their lives and thought against the background of the theme of "nostalgia." It is indeed remarkable that figures of such importance in Japanese intellectual history and religion have heretofore received little scholarly attention outside of Japan. Nosco notes that there are no other major works in English on this topic besides Shigeru MATSUMOTO's biography of Motoori Norinaga (1970) and H. D. HAROOTUNIAN's work *Things Seen and Unseen: Discourse and Ideology in Tokugawa Nativism* (1988). This fact alone would make Nosco's book important.

More importantly, though, the work provides significant historical and intellectual background to the current discussions of nationalism and national identity in Japan. Nosco notes the connection of his work to nostalgia for the past in contemporary Japan and to what he refers to as a "new nationalism." Even more pressing is its relevance to the ongoing debate concerning national identity which has been carried on under the umbrella of *nihonjinron*. It is, in fact, somewhat surprising that Nosco makes no more than a passing reference to this debate. While this is assuredly a large and complex topic, it would have been useful to have a fuller discussion of these issues in the first or last chapter.

Though Nosco does not give us a fuller current contextualization for his work (no doubt, though, because this merits a study in itself), he does attempt to provide a broad historical and social background for Kokugaku thought. Nosco notes that in reworking his earlier dissertation on nativism his concern was to contextualize National Learning; acknowledging the difficulty of this, he limits the scope of his discussion to the Genroku period (1688–1704). This he does in chapter 2, "Creating a Context: Popular Culture and the Academy in Genroku Japan." While his treatment of the Genroku period is careful and comprehensive, it simply sets the stage for the emergence of nativist thought

in the late seventeenth century, not for its fuller development and unfolding in the eighteenth century. Similar background material for the eighteenth century, when the National Learning movement was strongest, would have been even more useful.

In the central chapters of his book Nosco discusses the major Kokugaku thinkers, namely Kada no Azumamaro (1669–1736), Kamo no Mabuchi, (1697–1769), and Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801). He notes especially their contributions to an understanding of the Ancient Way through their studies on the *Nihon shoki*, *Man'yōshū*, and *Kojiki*, respectively. Nosco acknowledges that it is difficult to distinguish the philosophical, political, and literary aspects of their work because of the close interconnection of these topics in their thought. This is certainly the case, and Nosco does an excellent job of presenting their “nostalgic perspectives on the past” and their “patriotic assertions of Japanese superiority” (p.14) in their search for the Ancient Way. His discussions of their ideas and of some of their principle works will be invaluable for all further research in the area of Shinto studies.

My one concern for such research is for greater clarification of the terminology, especially such words as “nationalism” and “religion.” In a scholarly work on the nativist thinkers, for whom language was so important, it was somewhat disappointing not to have clearer definitions of these terms, which could then have provided us with more illuminating interpretive categories for future cross-cultural studies. With regard to nationalism, for example, researchers on nativist studies might profit by investigating certain Western language works. The European historian Carlton J.H. Hayes’ last book, *Nationalism: A Religion*, may have some relevance to these discussions, as would the research of Hans Kohn. With regard to “religion,” there still remain many important distinctions to be made if we wish to illuminate the internal dynamics of non-Western religions without introducing terminology laden with Christian overtones. Furthermore, it would be helpful to draw some distinctions between the uses of nativist ideas for religious or ideological ends.

Nosco uses language that is distinctively Christian in describing nativist thought in general and that of Mabuchi and Norinaga in particular. He speaks, in general, of nativist thought as Shinto “theology.” The difficulty with this term is that it has such close associations with Western monotheistic religion, particularly Christianity, as to be somewhat problematic when applied to a polytheistic tradition such as Shinto. Furthermore, it raises the question of whether the nativist thinkers were themselves “theologians” within the tradition of Shinto belief and practice, or simply scholars, literary critics, and philosophers commenting on the tradition.

In Nosco’s discussion of the thought of Mabuchi and Norinaga the use of Christian theological terminology becomes even more obvious. Nosco notes that Mabuchi believes when humans self-consciously learned morality they experienced a “Fall” from a paradisaical innocent past where natural goodness prevailed. According to Nosco’s reading of Mabuchi, this Fall could be reversed by reanimating the true heart so that humans are “born again.” This state of rebirth is also referred to by Nosco as the “resurrection of ancient beatific qualities in the present” (p. 240). Are not the terms “Fall,” “born again,” “beatific,”

and “resurrection” so closely connected to Christianity as to make their application to Shinto somewhat misleading?

Furthermore, Nosco notes that Norinaga’s thought is distinctively “fundamentalist” and “religious” without fully defining these terms. He maintains that for Norinaga the *Kojiki* was considered a “True Book” with “scriptural authority” and that to follow the Ancient Way required faith in the gods. Again, clearer definitions might have been illuminating here because of the close association of many of these terms with contemporary movements in Christianity. In what way is the term “fundamentalist” being used? Does it imply traditionalist, conservative, or reactionary positions? Does “scriptural authority” suggest divine revelation as it does in Western religions?

Finally, I have two small questions regarding Nosco’s discussion of Neo-Confucianism. One is when he speaks of Wang Yang-ming Neo-Confucianism (*Yōmeigaku*) as “heterodox” in reference to Kumazawa Banzan (p. 43). This implies that Chu Hsi Neo-Confucianism is orthodox. In this particular discussion it is not clear whether Nosco is suggesting that these distinctions apply across East Asia or whether he is referring to the later Kansai Edict, which promulgated the importance of Chu Hsi Neo-Confucianism as a means of supporting the Hayashi family. It is doubtful whether the notion of Wang Yang-ming as heterodox had widespread or long-lasting currency in East Asia. My other question concerns Nosco’s implication in his discussion of Itō Jinsai that “orthodox Neo-Confucianism taught one to distrust” one’s emotions (p. 36). This is certainly not the case in figures such as Kaibara Ekken and others who, following Chu Hsi, felt that emotions should be affirmed and expressed appropriately. The Neo-Confucians, in fact, recognized the importance of ritual and music as a means of allowing the satisfactory expression of emotions. They referred back to the *Doctrine of the Mean* which suggested that when feelings are aroused they should attain their proper measure and degree.

These objections are, however, minor in light of Nosco’s significant contribution to our understanding of a major movement in Japanese intellectual and religious history. This area of research is so important, in fact, that my one disappointment with the book was that Nosco did not provide us with a character list. My comments are intended simply to encourage further interpretive studies of this kind by Nosco and others in a field of enormous significance, both for the understanding of Japanese religions and for the illumination of the current discussion of nationalism in contemporary Japan.

REFERENCES

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