

Japan : Its Land, People and Culture

Compiled by Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, Printing Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1958. pp. 43+1077, four maps, about 200 un-numbered pages of plates. ¥ 3,000.

Publication in English of a reliable and comprehensive volume on Japan has long been necessary. Japan has changed so tremendously in recent decades and research by Japanese scholars has advanced so greatly that most prewar material is very much out of date. It was, therefore, with genuine pleasure and anticipation that *Japan, Its Land, People and Culture*, compiled by the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, was welcomed.

The volume is unusually attractive in appearance. The nearly two hundred pages of plates depicting all phases of life in this country are excellent. The list of

writers contributing manuscripts in Japanese reads like a "Who's Who" of Japanese scholars. Moreover, the scope of this 1077 page volume with four useful maps is equally impressive. There are altogether thirty-three chapters so that not even a listing of them can be given in this review. The Table of Contents alone covers twenty-eight pages and the totally inadequate index eighteen. The modest price of ¥ 3,000, which would not have been possible had the volume been produced commercially, places it within reach of all who are likely to want to use it. Here, indeed, is a volume that will

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be in most of the large public and private libraries and in many of the embassies and consulates of the world.

This is a book of which Japan can be proud, and yet, this pride must be tempered with sober reflection, not to say considerable chagrin. There are some extremely unfortunate shortcomings which seriously limit the value of the work of these eminent scholars. This is disheartening, because probably all of them could have been avoided. The plea of lack of funds simply will not hold water in this case. The Japanese Government had too much to lose in putting out a defective volume. Japan cannot afford to put out anything but the best. In this case, sheer carelessness, a false sense of economy and false pride appear to have prevented the production of what might well have been one of the outstanding volumes of this nature in the world.

This is a serious charge. To substantiate it, here is the bill of particulars.

1. Although there are approximately two hundred beautifully

done pages of plates, neither the pages nor the plates are numbered! It is, therefore, impossible to locate any plate except by tediously fingering through the pages; and impossible to even know how many pages there are except by counting them. This is an inexcusable defect. Apparently there are some items presented in the plates which are not discussed in the text. This cannot be proven until the entire volume has been read through carefully; but there are some plates of Japanese stamps, for example, yet neither the words "stamp," nor "philately" appear in either the table of contents or the index. The same is true in the case of the plates showing the Buddhist hand symbols.

2. There are some completely inexplicable factual errors. For example, on p. 503 we encounter the following statement: "With the disappearance of shrines from the nation, all Confucian elements were excluded from education." This is indeed surprising in view of the fact that some 80,000 shrines have continued to exist for years and are today incorporated with

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the government as religious juridical persons! Again on p. 517 in connection with an explanation of the posthumous names (*kaimyō*) we read that "Buddhism taught that all become priests after leaving this world." Then on the same page we are told that "The relation of people and the god of *uji* (cian) were inherited from Buddhist temple worship." None of these are correct.

3. There is obviously a lack of editorial unity so necessary in a volume of this type. Although on page 510 we read that "The movements of new and smaller sects, which have branched off, are not worth describing," there is a discussion of them on pages 525—527.

4. Some statements simply do not make sense: Here are two examples.

(1) "Nippon Tenshu Kōkyō Kyōdan (The name of the Catholic Church during world War II, Ed.) consulted with the League of Religion Divisions and in Showa 27 (1952) it changed into the Catholic Central Council." (p. 522) What is meant by the "League of Religion Divisions" is anyone's guess,

but it should go without saying that in making any such changes no outsiders were consulted by the Church. Instead of "Catholic Central Council," the name should be "National Catholic Committee of Japan," However, this not the name of Church, which is organized by dioceses, and is generally known as the "Catholic Church in Japan."

(2) Regarding Masahisa Uemura (1758—1925), who during his adult life as pastor of a large church in Tokyo was a public figure and often the center of controversy, it says on p. 521 that "he endeavored to hold to his pure beliefs in a secluded church by which he would be isolated from the contact with the world."

The only way to account for these and other errors is that either the scholars whose names are listed at the beginning did not in every case actually write the articles but left it to their students, or that the translators simply did not understand the material they were translating and never took the trouble to check with the authors or any other authorities.

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This is probably what happened.

The English in this volume is well above average; but there are very few Japanese translators, no matter how good they are, who are so good that they do not need to have their material reviewed by a foreigner whose native language is English. Unfortunately, a great many of them are apparently too proud to do it; but government officials can not afford to be proud. It is the reputation of Japan that suffers.

Recently a foreigner who has spent many years in this country commented that the absurd things said by foreigners about Japan are only exceeded by the unbelievably absurd things they say about themselves. Nowhere is this statement more evident than in this magnificent, but unfortunately defective volume. A prize example of this is in the introduction, which uses the first personal pronoun but is nonetheless unsigned. On page 5 the writer says regarding the Japanese that they "live in dwellings built of thatched roofs and

wooden or bamboo pillars just as the people in Southeast Asia." Of course, there are some thatched roofs in Japan, although they are hard to find in the cities and are gradually disappearing elsewhere. But a person must travel a long time in Japan to find a house built like "the people of South-east Asia." Houses on pillars are so rare, in fact, that the reviewer, who has been in this country for nearly forty years, has no idea where to find anything but a shrine or temple, or the Shōsōin built in this manner.

Most Japanese people can not understand the English language well enough to discuss the errors mentioned above. It is the foreigner, who has lived here so long and has grown attached to the land, people, and culture, whose feelings are deeply hurt. But the Japanese in responsible positions should thoroughly reflect on what their carelessness, false economy and false pride do to the reputation of their country. (WPW)