The Religions of the World Made Simple

by John Lewis
Glossary, pp. 191, $1.00

This volume by the lecturer in philosophy at Morley College, London, England is in its fourth printing (April, 1960). Here is what happens when the religions of Japan are "made simple" (pp. 44–51).

Chapter Six

BUDDHISM IN CHINA AND JAPAN—SHINTO

The Text

Page 44
1. "The Buddha left no successor and no ecclesiastical organization."

2. "It was sixty years before the verbal teachings of Gautama were set down in writing."

Reviewer's Comment

The Buddha left no single successor because in view of the nature of his teachings, this would have been inappropriate; but he left several successors and he established an ecclesiastical organization.

It was about 300 years after his death that the verbal teachings of Gautama were set down in writing. Until then the teachings were memorized and transmitted orally.

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3. "Buddhism never claimed to be an authoritative revelation."

4. "The Pali scriptures were not written down until 80 B.C.

5. "The scriptures of the Mahayana school have never been systematized like those of the Hinayana school."

6. "It [the Lotus Sutra] preaches the doctrine of the Cosmic Buddha in whom all things consist."

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7. "Islam has driven it [Buddhism] from Malaya and Indonesia where only monuments remain."

8. "...the Sixth Great Council of the Hinayana Buddhists.

What does this mean? Most Buddhists very definitely believe that the teaching, dharma (hō) is authoritative. Whether awakening or enlightenment is revelation may be debatable.

The exact date cannot be stated with such certainty.

They have been systematized in the same way as the teachings of the Theravāda (Hinayana) school.

The Lotus Sutra preaches the doctrine of the Eternal Buddha. The Cosmic Buddha, that is, Vairocana, is preached in the Kegon Sutra.

In Malaya and Indonesia we can find not only monuments but also small, active Buddhist organizations, both Chinese and Malayan.

Southern Buddhists dislike the word “Hinayana” because it originated as a Mahayanist term of contempt. They prefer the term Theravāda, meaning “School of Elders.” The correct name is the Sixth Buddha Sāsana Council.

a. Pāli, "teaching "

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9. "......at Rangoon where a great
ew World Peace Pagoda has been
built to seat 15,000 people."

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10. "Many [Hinayanaists] believe
that this closes the Buddhists era
and that a new Buddha will appear."

11. "Mahayana possesses in addition
to its popular literature, another type that is abstract, phi-
losophical and paradoxical, which
was first formulated in Northern
India."

12. "It is difficult to put esoteric
Mahayana doctrine into conceptual
form."

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13. "Amida is, of course, a Bod-
hisattva."

This should read: "...... a great
new World Peace Pagoda and a
hall, constructed to resemble a
cave, which will seat 15,000 people,
has been built."

Some may believe this. There
is no reason to think that they re-
present the position of "many"
Theravāda Buddhists.

The meaning here is not clear.
Mahayana doctrine, including the
document of nothingness (śūnyatā)
is believed to have been first for-
mulated in southern India. In view
of the paragraph which follows it
appears that the author may be
confusing this with esoteric Bud-
dhism which some scholars believe
may have been first formulated in
southern India.

The author seems to identify all
Mahayana doctrine with esoteric
Buddhism, but the latter did not
appear until about the 7th century
A.D.

It would be more accurate to say,
"Amida was a bodhisattva named
Hōzō (Skt., Dharmākara)."
14. “It was in China that Mahayana Buddhism had its chief success and it was here that the practical-minded and this-worldly Chinese developed the doctrines of the Pure Land and the Bodhisattvas.”

“The author seems to imply that the Bodhisattva concept is of Chinese origin. Actually this concept is found in Theravāda sutras and was already in Mahayana Buddhism by the 1st century A.D. It’s fuller development took place in China.

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15. “Avalokites-vara”

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16. “The most extraordinary form of Mahayana Buddhism [that is, Zen,] was founded in China by a ferocious Indian sage, Bodhidharma

17. “......revelation comes not by striving but by a sudden jolt.”

Why extraordinary? Zen Buddhism, being based on the practices by which Gautama himself is believed to have attained enlightenment, would seem to be a very natural development. Why ferocious? To the oriental, at least, Bodhidharma’s countenance is benign, pleasing, or interesting, but never ferocious.

Over-simplification has resulted in a preoccupation with one form of Zen, that is, the Zen of the Lin-chi (Rinzai in Japan), also
called Kan-hua 看話 (Kanna in Japan) or Kung-an 公案 (Kōan in Japan) Zen, and the complete neglect of the Zen of the Tsao-tung 瑞洞 (Sōtō in Japan) Sect, that is, the Mo-chao 默照 (Mokushō in Japan) Zen, or the Zen of silent meditation. In Japan the Sōtō Sect reports 15,140 temples and 6,816,715 adherents, whereas the fourteen traditional Rinzai Sects report a total of 5,228 temples and 2,999,220 adherents.

Should read "Satori"

It is true that in the Kamakura 鎌倉 period (1185〜1333) Zen Buddhism "gave direction to Bushidō 武士道," but Jōdo Buddhism also appealed to the warriors at the end of the Heian 平安 period and in the beginning of the Kamakura period.

Not only Zen, but all other forms of Buddhism were "combined with Japanese native elements" and contributed to "Japanese social existence."
REVIEWS

21. "Its [Zen] spirit shaped the moral attitudes and modes of living that are called Bushido...."

The author creates the impression that there was no ethics in Japanese life except Bushido; but Bushido was the ethics of the warrior class. There were other classes in Japan and these as well as the warrior class were influenced ethically by other forms of Buddhism.

The author, as well as other Western scholars, should know that Japanese Buddhism and Zen Buddhism are not identical. Without in any way belittling the contribution of Zen to Japanese life, attention should be called to the fact that, according to the 1961 Religions Year Book (Shūkyō Nenkan) published by the Ministry of Education, out of a total of more than 47 million Buddhists, only about 10 million are Zen adherents. Pure Land Buddhism has over 14 million, Nichiren nearly 11 million, Shingon 10 million, and Tendai 2.3 million.
REVIEWS

SHINTO

The discussion of this subject is very confusing because of a failure to distinguish between the past, that is, pre-surrender Shinto, and the present. Before disestablishment all shrines were "state shrines." The author is aware that "Shinto shrines have been disestablished" (p. 51), but he nonetheless uses the expression, "State Shinto appears to be ......" and refers to "State Shrines " in the present tense (p. 50).

Page 50
22. "It is the only vital religion of the 80,000,000 subjects of the Emperor of Japan."

23. "Shinto, however, cannot divorce itself from the basic psychological and anthropological roots of all religions."

24. "The word for gods is kami 

25. "The Shrines ...... are small, simple, and very numerous."

This sentence smacks of the pre-World War II psychology. In view of the preceding discussion of Buddhism, it is something of a surprise to learn that Shinto "is the only vital religion" in Japan. This is, of course, absurd.

Even when the book was published in 1958, the population of the country was close to 90 million.

Postwar Shinto scholarship does not attempt to do this. Generally speaking it is just as modern and objective as Western scholarship.

This is the most common word. There are others.

Most shrines are relatively small and simple. Some are elaborate, even elegant.
26. "There are over 100,000 of them [shrines]."

27. "There are public rituals at the state shrines and festivals for the family and village shrines."

28. "In the eighteenth century Shinto was purged of foreign influences, especially Buddhist, and declared to be the only true religion."

29. "Shinto was proclaimed the religion of the Japanese State."

30. "The department concerned is the Ministry of the Interior ..."

There may be, but the official figure is 79,775.

There are no "state shrines" today, All shrines are private religious institutions. There are festivals at all shrines. (It would require too much space to straighten out this over-simplification.)

In the eighteenth century a movement arose to purge Shinto of foreign influences; but it was only partially successful. I question whether Shinto was ever "declared to be the only true religion," except, perhaps by a few individuals.

After an abortive attempt to make Shinto the state religion, shrines were separated from other forms of Shinto, and Shrine Shinto became a "non-religious" state cult.

This Ministry was abolished in 1947. Since 1945 the administration of shrines as incorporated religious bodies has been in the Ministry of Education.
31. "Shinto is ...... a national obligation, with a prior claim over all religious allegiance. Christians and Buddhist may profess their own religions, but they must acknowledge the supreme authority of the State and attend the State Shrines."

32. "The total number of State Shrines is 183."

33. "About 17,000,000 Japanese are included in a number of recent sects ......"

This statement is too extreme, even as a description of the pre-war situation. It completely misrepresents the present situation. Probably in no country in the world is freedom of religion more complete than in Japan today.

(Other comments are called for but they require too much detail and so are omitted.)

This figure cannot be identified. Presumably it was taken from sources published in the middle or late 1920s. According to the Shinto Encyclopedia (1938) there were at the time of writing, in addition to the Grand Shrine of Ise, 116 national shrines (kanpei-sha) and 89 government shrines (kokuhei-sha), or a total of 205 shrines that were under the direct supervision of the national government and, therefore, in this special sense might be called "State Shrines."

This statement is found under the heading of "Shinto Sects:" but it is difficult to know exactly

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what is meant. The figure 17 million was used at one time (1937) for the thirteen sects of "Sectarian Shintō."

The total for some 126 Shinto sects, according to the Ministry of Education, was some 12 million in 1953 and is about the same today.

As already stated, no religion, including Shrine Shinto, is under state control.

The above and other errors not noted may be accounted for perhaps by the bibliography at the end of the chapter. The four references dealing with religion in Japan are all pre-war and the ones on Buddhism are concerned only with Zen.

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