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Religious Studies in Japan

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One does not have to be in Japan very long to discover that Japanese scholars are making tremendous contributions to the study of religions. In universities, research centers and various institutes, various projects are being carried out, usually in the midst of lively discussion, which increase our knowledge and understanding of the world of religion in general, and the religions of Japan in particular.

Unfortunately for lazy Americans (such as this writer) who have never learned Japanese, much of this material is written in Japanese and is therefore a closed book. Hence, such a volume as *Religious Studies in Japan* is to be warmly welcomed, for it brings together articles in English covering a wide

range of subject matter by forty-five outstanding Japanese scholars, many of whom are widely known in the West as well as Asia for previous work. In this volume one gets a glimpse of these minds at work, and the resulting view is impressive indeed.

Naturally, this wide range of subject matter is in itself a drawback. Although the articles have been grouped loosely according to convenient categories, there is very little continuity. The book is not particularly useful for systematic study, and was not intended to be used for such. Needless to say, if one were to survey the work of forty-five men in any country in any field, the resulting horizon would be rather uneven and the

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same is true here: there are hills and valleys, several jutting, craggy rocks, quite a bit of fog now and then, but some unmistakable mountain peaks not one but several Fujiyamas.

It was deemed wise by the editor of this journal and the reviewer to review this volume in two parts. The first half of the book consists essentially of methodological studies, and the second half primarily of studies related to particular religions. I have decided to review the second half first, for various reasons, and will review the first half of the book and make a concluding evaluation in the next issue of this journal.

Three articles on Shinto, by Messrs. Harada, Nishitsunoi, and Toda, may be said to represent an effort to delve deeper into Shinto in order to explicate in an adequate theoretical framework the meaning of Japanese traditional religion. The first two articles in this section, both of which relate Shinto to the total community, were extremely helpful. It is interesting to note that Prof. Toda, in referring to Jesus' resurrection,

says he was "revived" (p. 231), which is hardly what the New Testament means.

When Professor Miyamoto deals with his favorite topic of "Ultimate Middle" in Buddhism and Professor Nagao discusses "Buddhist Subjectivity," I am made aware, quickly and painfully, of my own weakness in philosophy, or of a lack of clarity in the two articles. Although it is certainly the former, I do not think Miyamoto really answers the charge that Buddhism is nihilistic (pp. 237—241).

My chief regret with Professor Nakamura's article is that I did not have his discussion of Buddhist ethics at hand when I was writing a thesis on that subject about two years ago. He calls attention to a central problem: if I and my neighbors are, according to Buddhist philosophy, "bundles of constituent elements, instantaneously perishing all the time, there is nothing which friendliness and compassion could work on." His answer is not completely adequate for me; for I do not see how ridding ourselves of the notion of Self and the "limitless expansion of the self

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in a practical sense" really provide anything "to work on." (p. 277) Nonetheless, the article with its plea for a new approach in Buddhist studies, is superb.

Messrs. Hadano and Kanakura have given us meticulous detailed essays on Indian Tantrism and an Asvaghosha bibliography, respectively. Professor Nishi tries to prove that Mahayana Buddhism is the orthodox Buddhism, but it is quite plain that a Mahayanist is speaking, and that he deals with his evidence from a Mahayanist point of view. Professor Yamada gives an interesting sidelight on the role played by certain Indian kings in the formation of Mahayana sutras, although the title leads one to expect much more. Professor Yamaguchi's study of the Madhyamika criticism of Indian theism is carefully done, but I doubt if such criticism was the major reason why Buddhism was regarded as a heresy by orthodox Hinduism. For my part, Buddhism taught an essentially different *dharma*, of which the *anatta* theory was only a part.

Articles on Chinese Buddhism by Messrs. Masunaga, Sakamoto

and Tsukamoto widen the scope of our knowledge about an area that is difficult to approach these days. And one must say, that, in spite of the great value of D. T. Suzuki's works, the vast number of them in English have meant a one-sided view of Buddhism for the West. We must have other writers, like Professor Masunaga, speaking about Zen and other forms of Buddhism to the West.

I was both stimulated and disturbed by Professor Hanayama's article on Ekayana thought in Japan. One can see the obvious sincerity involved in this attempt to have "One Vehicle" which is intended to absolve the conflict between the "Little Vehicle" and the "Great Vehicle." But Hanayama himself shows quite clearly that the passion for Ekayana resulted in several new sects in Japanese Buddhism, which hardly furthers the unity supposedly inherent in the one vehicle concept.

Professor Takezono concludes the series of articles on Buddhism with an excellent account of the role of official governmental forces which fostered Buddhist-Shinto

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syncretism.

As we turn to Christianity, we find first Professor Ohata's attempt to delineate the "Jewishness" of the Apostle Paul, but Ohata is unconvincing in his argument which is drawn with slight exception from proof texts. The best one can say is that he does not see the forest for the trees. On the other hand, Professor Nakagawa's exposition of the first four verses of the Letter to the Hebrews is masterful in every respect: critical, exegetical and theological.

Professor Ariga's essay on the "Basic Structure of Christian Thought" should be read by everyone, regardless of his faith, who would understand the central concern of Christian theology. He points out that the being-becoming antithesis is clearly secondary to a hayathological motif in the Christian doctrine of God, deriving this staggering word from the Hebrew *hayah*, meaning "to become, to become, to happen, to act and to be, all in one." (p. 418)

In dean Kan's article on liturgics we see through the eyes of one who is still discovering new vistas

in the theology of Karl Barth, the theological patron saint of Japanese Protestantism. In President Kuwada's article, on the other hand, we follow the struggle of a man who sees that Barth's theology has its inadequancies, the most glaring being its failure to grapple with the problem of faith and culture. In this Barthian impasse, Kuwada turns to Paul Tillich whose discussion of faith and culture is most provocative. I do not see, frankly, how Kuwada will "combine Barth and Tillich," but Japanese industrialists and theologians are resourceful people and maybe the job can be done.

It is encouraging to see that Professor Matsumura is willing to discuss the work of philosophy and theology in some kind of relationship, and our keenest admiration is evoked by the responsible statement of the apologetic task by Professor Muto.

Two articles on Taoism, one by Professor Fukui on the schools of Taoism, and another by Professor Kubo on the introduction of Taoism to Japan, are extremely important contributions to this volume. We

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know less, probably, concerning more articles such as these will
Taoism than in other religious follow.

orientation; it is to be hoped that Tokyo Richard Bush

(Dr. Bush will review the first half of *Religious Studies in Japan*
and give a concluding estimate of the book as a whole in the next
issue of this journal. Ed.)
