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Konko-kyo : A Japanese Religion

By Delwin B. Schneider. ISR, Tokyo. 1962.
pp. xv + 166 ¥900. (\$ 2.50)

The book is the text of a dissertation, presented as part-requirement for a Doctor's Degree in the Graduate Department of Systematic Theology at St. Paul's University. We already have treatments on two of the so-called "Shinto Sects" — one on Kurozumi-kyō appearing in 1935 (C. W. Hepner: *The Kurozumi Sect of Shinto*, Tokyo. pp. 263) and another on Tenri-kyō in 1957 (H. van Straelen: *The Religion of Divine Wisdom*, Kyoto, pp. 235), which, together with *Konkō-kyō*, are the most remarkable of the "New Religions" to emerge towards the end of the Tokugawa era. As *Konkō-kyō* has influenced many more recent religious movements, and is still a continuing force in Japan, howbeit less wealthy and influential than Tenri-kyō, it certainly merited attention, and it is a pleasure to welcome a monograph on the subject, even though the one under review would seem to be far from a definitive work. For a doctoral

dissertation the bibliography would seem to be far from adequate and over-much dependent upon non-Japanese sources of information. The fact that more recent developments in *Konkō-kyō* doctrine are more subtle and metaphysical than anything the founder conceived of suggests that more attention might have been given to developments in *Konkō-kyō* thought, and a more critical approach to the Canonical Scriptures, of which a translation (not always accurate!) occurs in Dr. Schneider's book, might have been demonstrated. A perusal of the scriptures will soon show that there is no logical enunciation of the doctrine. We find instead a series of pithy sayings, reminiscent at times of the worldly wisdom that has marked "Wisdom Literature" in many countries, although throughout there is an underlying piety, which suggests that Bunjirō Kawate was a simple, but genuine character. The stress throughout

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is decidedly upon experience rather than ontology.

Dr. Schneider speaks of his thesis as "A Study in the Continuities of Native Faiths" and very rightly begins with an attempt to understand the old and, in particular, the strength of Japan's Shinto heritage, pointing to the acceptance of the new within the framework and over against the presuppositions of the old. He then speaks of Konkō-kyō itself as "A Contemporary Expression" — but here one is left in doubt as to which Konkō-kyō is "contemporary" — whether that of Kawate himself or that of his successors, who have since received the impact of Christian ideas and the comparative study of religions.

The style of writing is very readable, although annoyingly tendentious at times. Surely it is not necessary in a book — let alone in a doctoral dissertation — to laud every author quoted! Perhaps there was a desire to show that the sources used were the best! Much as one may admire Dr. Holtom's writings on Shinto (and here, in writing on the Kami, Dr. Schneider might well have referred to the

series of articles on the "meaning of Kami" in *Monumenta Nipponica*, 1940 & 1941), can one say that he "has done more than any other in our generation in explaining the complexity of Shinto"? (p. 5). What of the contributions of men like Genji Katō and the scholars in Kokugakuin University? One may be sincerely indebted to William P. Woodard (as is also this present reviewer), but, once again, there is no need to describe him as "the able and perceptive director of the International Institute etc." (p. 8). Again, cannot Maraini be quoted without stating that it is a "magnificent passage" (p. 47)? Daisetz Suzuki is sufficiently known to dispense with the description — "who has more than anyone else put words around the moods of Japan." (p. 53). One is almost surprised when no identification is given for Joseph Kitagawa, although we are assured that what he gives is "a penetrating analysis" (p. 54)! In writing of Bunjirō's birth, we are given a melodramatic account of who "held court" and who "held the reins of power," whilst we are assured that he "was born," that "he saw the

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light of day," that he "came into the world," and that "his birth took place"! (p. 59) Similarly, we are given an introduction to some of the personalities who happened to have been born in the land of Kibi, as was Bunjiro Kawate, even though there is no particular link with the theme of the book. (pp. 60—61)

Such criticisms, however, apply more to the style than to the content, although one wishes that more space had been given to an examination of Konkō-kyō writings or an exposition of the scriptures themselves in place of much unrelated generalizing. There is still plenty to whet the appetite for more, and some telling descriptions of popular religion and the background of thought and devotion out of which Konkō-kyō arose. One may query whether the deity's name "Tenchi Kane no Kami" really means "the kami who unifies and combines and joins the things of heaven and the things of earth." (p. 117) This reviewer would feel that such a concept, whilst suggested as the correct interpretation by Dr. Holtom (whom Dr. Schneider here follows), is a bit too metaphysical for the

founder!

The International Institute for the Study of Religions can be commended on the production of a delightful volume, which seems to have gone through careful proof-reading! Our thanks go to Dr. Schneider for a pioneer work in a field where it is hoped that others, too, will work.

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