

Die Lotus-Lehre und die modernen Religionen in Japan

(The Lotus Doctrine and the Modern Religions of Japan)

*by Werner Kohler, Zurich ; Atlantis Verlag, 1962,
pp. 300.*

The author of this new addition to the fast-growing list of works on the New Religions is a professor of the Science of Religion, and of Missiology at the University of Heidelberg. Besides being a specialist in the field of religion, he had personal contact with the movements he describes during the years he spent in Japan, teaching at Dōshisha University, Kyoto (Not Tokyo, as erroneously stated on the jacket), and the International Christian University, Tokyo. The author

intends to present a general survey of the more important "Modern" religions, to describe their characteristics and to make clear their place in history (p. 13). From a look at the contents it would seem that the author fulfilled his promise.

The first two chapters, one on the characteristics of modern religions in Japan, another on the place of religion in the history of Japan and on religion in Japan today, can be considered as an introduction to the subject. A chapter

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on typical modern religions, successively describing Tenri-kyō, Ōmoto, P L Kyōdan, Seichō-no-Ie and Cōdō Shūkyō, follows. The author goes on to treat the Lotus Sutra, its place in Buddhism and its contents, and devotes a chapter to Nichiren. Then the following chapter describes the three main religions based on the Lotus Sutra: Sōka Gakkai, Reiyū Kai and Risshō Kōsei Kai. Finally there is a chapter on the relation between the cult of the dead and shamanism, followed by some reflections on our attitude towards the New Religions, a rather extensive though incomplete bibliography, and a useful index.

It goes without saying that a lot of information is to be found in this fairly extensive work, the most useful being the chapters on the Lotus Sutra and on Nichiren. However, the approach of the author to his subject remains open to question. According to Kohler, religions can be understood only from within (p. 180). Therefore, he not only carefully avoids all criticism and judgment of the New Religions, but states that it is better to pass over

silently "gelehrte Zeitgenossen" who criticize "im Namen Jesu Christi die Verschlossenheit der Japaner oder die Primitivität der neuen religiösen Bewegungen in mutloser und heuchlerischer Freundlichkeit . . ." (" . . . pass over silently learned contemporaries who criticize in the name of Jesus Christ the closed-ness of the Japanese or the primitiveness of the new religious movements with their lack of courage and flattering friendliness . . .") He even adds a reason: "denn gerade die unverständigen Mitmenschen benötigen unser Verständnis." ("for just the unreasonable people need our understanding") (p. 281) For samples of criticism see p. 216 and pp. 274—275.

Trying to understand these movements from within, the author obviously bases most of his work on publications prepared by the organizations which he describes. Furthermore, it seems that he very candidly accepted them at face value. However sympathetic an attitude this may be, it would seem that a judgment has to be made and, if an author who is a specialist refuses to make this judgment, he will

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merely increase the reader's difficulties to come to a just evaluation.

This is all the more true when the book, as would seem to be the case here, addresses itself to the general public rather than to specialists. The author, in nearly every instance, explains the many Japanese terms which he uses throughout the work. Sometimes these explanations sound rather childish and pedantic (e. g. the author explains the word *rokudo* as follows: "Roku ist die Zahl sechs, do (kun: tabi) heisst 'mal.' Rokudo heisst also wortlich sech. mal und bedeutet: das sechsfache Training." ("*roku* is the number six, *do* means times. *Rokudo* means, literally, six times, and designates the sixfold training.") Elsewhere, however, an explanation would be welcome. In his chapter on the Dancing Religion (*Odoru Shūkyō*) the author writes: "Seisho (—Heiliges Buch (Eng. — 'Holy Book') . . ." It would have been useful if the author had mentioned that this "Seisho" should not be confounded with the Bible (Seisho 聖書 Heiliges Buch), but that he is speaking of the scripture of Odoru

Shūkyō, which is also called "Seisho" but written 生書 and should be translated as "Book of Life."

The book, moreover, contains not a few errors, and misprints. To quote but a few: Nara is called the first capital of Japan (true only in a very limited sense); the author speaks of the five Nara sects of Buddhism (there are six); and the statement that Japan came into contact with Europe and especially with Greek culture during the Nara period would call for more explanation (p. 27). The account of the strife between the Genji-Minamoto and Heike-Taira clans is at least confusing (p. 32). The same could be said about the statement that Tenri-kyō and also P. L. Kyōdan founded a city (p. 17). It would also seem that the statistics, trustworthy in most places, got mixed up in a few places (e. g. p. 17: "zu den Abonnenten seiner? (Seichō-No-Ie's Taniguchi) zählt jeder zehnte Bewohner der Zehnmillionenstadt Tokyo." (" . . . every tenth inhabitant of Tokyo, which has a population of 10,000,000, is a subscriber of his (Taniguchi).) It also would be rather difficult to give

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proof of the statement: "Der Zweck heiligt die Mittel," dieser Grundsatz der auf Ignatius von Loyola Zurückgeht." ("The end justifies the means," a principle which was introduced by Ignatius of Loyola.) As for misprints: p. 41: 1604, read 604; p. 65: Miroku-butsumi, read Miroku Bosatsu; p. 92: Zange no seigatsu, read seikatsu; p. 93: Kamio Sabuku, read Kami (w) ō sabuku;

p. 202: 1925, read 1923; p. 274: (1836—1819), read (1836—1918).

All in all, a book no better nor worse than the others on the New Religions in Japan, a subject which still awaits a balanced treatment.

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Note: The above book is available at the Kyō Bun Kwan, Tokyo, for ¥ 2,650, Ed.

Kanji Glossary

Dōshisha 同志社
Genji, Minamoto 源氏, 源
Heike, Taira 平家, 平
Kami (w) o sabuku 神を審く
Kyō Bun Kwan 教文館
Kyōto 京都
Miroku Bosatsu 弥勒菩薩
Nichiren 日蓮
Odoru Shūkyō 踊る宗教
Ōmoto 大本

PL Kyōdan PL 教団
Reiyū Kai 霊友会
Risshō Kōsei Kai 立正佼成会
rokudo 六度
Seichō-No-Ie 生長の家
Sōka Gakkai 創価学会
Tanigucht 谷口
Tenri-kyō 天理教
Tōkyō 京都
Zange no seikatsu 懺悔の生活