



**Kazuo Kasahara, ed., *A History of Japanese Religion*.
Translated by Paul McCarthy and Gaynor Sekimori**

Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 2001. 648 pp. \$29.95 or ¥3,900,
paper. Maps, bibliography, index. ISBN 4-333-01917-6.

IT HAS BEEN A long time since a single book has appeared attempting to cover the entire range of “Japanese religion.” The field has become too vast and (dare I say) too fragmented, the specialists too specialized, for a single author to adequately present the full intricacies of various Japanese religious traditions and activities throughout some two thousand years of complex developments. The publication of Kasahara’s edited collection of essays by many of the best religious scholars of Japan is thus a truly welcome contribution.

As the title suggests, this collection offers chapters on the full spectrum of the history of Japanese religions, from “religion in primitive Japanese society” to “the growth of new religious movements” and “the established religions today.” The contributors are a group of “sixteen distinguished experts” including many of the best and brightest of the postwar generation of religious scholars in Japan, such as

Miyake Hitoshi, Miyata Noboru, Morioka Kiyomi, Shimode Sekiyo, Takagi Yutaka, Tamamuro Fumio, and Kasahara himself. Often different sections of the same chapter are written by different contributors. Although the emphasis is on Buddhism and its sectarian developments, there are adequate attempts to cover other religious traditions. There are sections, for example, on the cults of Miroku, Kannon, and Jizō; the early demise of Taoism as an independent religious tradition in Japan; the religious life of the villages; women and Buddhism; underground Buddhist movements; Christianity; various phases of “Shintō”; and so forth. I was especially pleased with the numerous treatments of Shugendō scattered throughout the book. Such a broad range of topics, and their competent treatment, makes this volume quite promising for use as a textbook for university-level classes on Japanese religions.

Special mention should be made of the superb job done on the editing and translation of this work. The book is well laid out, with numerous helpful maps, a very useful index (including the kanji for names, places, eras, and so forth), and no glaring typographical errors that often mar books done in Japan (and elsewhere) for Western readers. The translation in particular is extremely well done, and the text reads smoothly and easily, reflecting a professional care for both accuracy and elegance. It is a shame that the two translators, Paul McCarthy and Gaynor Sekimori, are not given due credit along with the list of the authors.

The book, however, is not without its problems. The original book in Japanese (*Nihon shūkyō shi*, Sekai Shūkyō Shi Sōsho Series, Yamakawa Shuppan) was published in 1977, which means that it is based on Japanese religious scholarship of the 1960s or early 70s, more than thirty years ago. Much water has passed under the bridge in the meantime, and the study of religion in Japan, and Japanese religions themselves, have undergone some major revisions. Nowhere to be found is the name of Kuroda Toshio and his *kenmitsu taisei* theories, the revisioning of “Kamakura Buddhism,” the doubts concerning Shōtoku Taishi, the activities of the “new new religions,” the Aum affair, and the redefining of “Shinto,” to mention only a few important issues. If this book is to be used as a textbook, the teacher will have to supplement the readings with various studies published more recently than the mid-1970s.

Further, the bibliography appears to be merely a translation (or, rather, a transliteration) of the original Japanese bibliography, and no work published later than 1977 is included. Only a handful of Western-language works are to be found, and this in a book meant for Western readers? If the purpose of the book is to provide an informative collection for people who do not read Japanese, what is the point in giving 13 pages of romanized bibliographical information on Japanese publications? If the reader can read Japanese and needs the bibliography from the Japanese edition, she can consult the original publication. Instead, updating the bibliography with Western-language works, especially those published in the last 30 years, would have provided a true service, though it must be pointed out that such a

task would have added greatly to the work (and stress) of the editors and translators.

Despite these shortcomings—and if supplemented with additional materials reflecting the scholarship on, and recent developments in, Japanese religions in the past thirty years—Kasahara's book should prove to be a reliable and informative textbook for a class on Japanese religions.

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