

Vol. 3: *Religion in the Japanese textbooks of Japanese history*, by Anzai Shin. 1974. 94 pp. 2-page appendix. ¥1,600 or US\$8.00.

When considered in relation to the forms of religion found in the West, Japanese religions may appear complicated and perhaps perplexing. There is the indigenous religion of Shinto; there are religions introduced from abroad, such as Christianity and Buddhism. From these main religious sources have sprung an incalculable number of sects and denominations. In addition are the countless folk religions which are devoid of any formal structure or organization. Japan is a country where many religions have flourished—and continue to flourish today.

But the religious scene in Japan, where many people are forced to crowd together on several small islands, is characterized by more than number and variety. Equally if not more important is the fact that a Japanese person may adhere simultaneously to two or more religions, vastly different or even logically incompatible. An individual's religion may diverge from that of his family, and it may happen that an adherent of two or more religions will concentrate on one to the exclusion of the others, depending on the problem at hand.

As other observers have noted, religion in Japan is substantially different from religion in monotheistic cultures. The range and diversity of religious phenomena found in Japan sometimes make it difficult to isolate or delineate the concept of religion as understood and practiced in Japanese society. To proffer a simple, concise definition of Japanese religion is by no means an easy task, for any definition runs the risk of limiting itself to presently existing religions or to the prominent religions of the past which have a secure niche in history.

The author of the book under review has astutely avoided a narrow and misinformed conception of religion in Japan. The first four chapters of this volume comprise for the most part a content analysis of twenty-six high school textbooks on Japanese history (all approved by the Ministry of Education) with reference to their presentation of religion. The fifth and final chapter is devoted to a presentation of the results of a separate study in which college students were polled as to the information and impressions they had received about religion in their high school history classes. The author investigated, in other words, not only the teaching materials but also how students were influenced by them. In his conclusion he states that the textbooks on Japanese history have failed to present a comprehensive or true picture of religion. Limited in scope, the textbooks provide, according to the author, only a superficial explanation of religion, ignoring such matters as the essence or function of religion, why people hold religious beliefs, and the status of religion in contemporary society.

Because this book examines Japanese history textbooks, its presentation is made in chronological fashion. Following this order, I should like to draw attention to a few of the examples cited in the book.

In examining the textbooks' treatment of the earliest and most primitive times, Anzai found that the books dealt rather comprehensively with the culture of the Jomon and Yayoi era people. Nevertheless, only one textbook mentioned shamanism, a phenomenon considered to have exercised no little influence on the development of present-day Japanese religions. He also points out that it would have been desirable for the textbooks to include a discussion of the authority and functions of the priests in primitive Japanese religion, a tradition that persists even today in the emperor system. As for early Buddhism, the textbooks apparently failed to make clear the true meaning and significance of Prince Shotoku's embracing of Buddhism in that they gave insufficient attention to the cultural and historical significance of this event.

The treatment accorded Heian and medieval Japanese religion, especially the True Sect of the Pure Land, elicits a similar observation. Though offering fairly detailed accounts of Kamakura Buddhism, the textbooks lack, in the author's opinion, the basis in research and understanding essential to an adequate description of living religious experience among the people of that period. Criticism of this kind

applies with special force to the textbooks' treatment of Shinto. Despite the important role Shinto has played as a primary folk religion and despite the fact that it lives on today in the hearts of the Japanese people, the textbooks virtually ignore the historical changes and transformations that have made Shinto what it is today.

Textbook discussions of Christianity are assessed as equally unsatisfactory. In chapter 3 Anzai points out that no textbook mentioned the staying power Christianity demonstrated even after its prohibition, and only passing mention was made of Christianity's reintroduction to Japan following the Meiji Restoration. The socio-historical role of Christianity in Japan was not explained to any significant extent.

Though I have lifted out only a few of the examples found in the books, the author persistently hammers home, perhaps even overemphasizes the point to be noted: only a superficial notion of religion can be gleaned from the textbooks on Japanese history. The way religion is presently dealt with in the textbooks overlooks the deeper, finer, and more fundamental aspects of past and present religion, and the result is a distorted and partial representation of the Japanese religious experience.

As mentioned above, the author seeks to substantiate the findings of his textbook analysis through presenting, in his final chapter, the results of a survey of religious attitudes among students of Sophia University and Sacred Heart Women's University. Respondents were polled as to the impressions of religion they received from their high school texts and classroom instruction. The survey results appear to corroborate the content analysis. Moreover, a relatively high level of religious interest and awareness among the college students was revealed—a result which suggests that the level and quality of religious instruction in high school fails to satisfy the students.

The author believes that human society and culture are closely bound up with religion and that religion is one of the chief elements in the formation of personal character. It is in the light of these considerations that the author, both as religious scholar and as educator, draws attention to the present situation in Japanese high school history education.

I concur with the author that history textbooks in Japanese high schools portray religion merely as a thing of the past, as something dead. Nowhere will one find even an intimation of the possibility

that living religious experience can stir the human soul or satisfy man's deepest yearnings.

The problem, however, has been examined in this volume only with reference to textbooks on Japanese history. I should think the discussion in the present volume would have been enriched and illumined had it included appropriate references to the findings of the preceding volumes in the series. I recognize that the original plan of publishing all the analyses and findings in a single volume had to be abandoned because of certain difficulties, but if volume 3 is any indication, perhaps the volumes are too independent of each other. A more explicitly identified thread of connection within the series would have provided for the reader additional insight.

Finally, I would like to mention my strongest reservation concerning this book and series. This reservation stems, quite frankly, from my feelings as a Japanese and has to do with the purpose of the series as stated in a Foreword.

We believe that everybody interested in Japanese education, at both the high school and university levels, will find here useful material for studying the present educational situation and its problems in this country.... It is sincerely to be hoped that something may be done in the near future to improve the quality and accuracy of the textbooks in the references, direct or otherwise, to religion, for as this study clearly shows, there is ample room for improvement.

Among the people who would surely benefit from reading this study are the people of Japan, particularly the historians who write the textbooks. Yet the language of the book is English, so it is obvious that the book is primarily directed to a foreign readership. I cannot help feeling that the Japanese people, being directly affected by the problems discussed in this series, would have received the most concrete benefits from this study. Perhaps priority should have been given to the idea of publishing a Japanese edition first.

TAKAGI Kiyoko
Associate Director
Inter-University Center for
Japanese Language Studies
Translated by Henry HAYASE