

Reviews

TOMIKURA Mitsuo 富倉光雄, FUKAWA Kiyoshi 布川清司, ÔHAMA Tetsuya 大浜徹也, and MIYATA Noboru 宮田登. *Kenshin* 献身 [Sacrificial death]. Tokyo: Kôbundô, 1975. 247 pp. Bibliography. ¥1,000.

The book under review was published as one of a projected fifteen-volume series (ふおるく叢書, "The Volk" Series) issued by Kôbundô. So far, *Shitsuke* しつけ [Child-rearing], *Sei* 性 [Sex], *Henshin* 変身 [Transfiguration], *Karada* からだ [The body], and *Sukui* 救い [Salvation] have already appeared. Volumes yet to come include *Hone* 骨 [Bones], *Arasoi* 争い [Disputes], and *Yakusoku* 約束 [Promises]. The novel thing about this series is that its themes are considered from the perspectives of a variety of disciplines such as anthropology, folklore, and religious studies.

The present volume, *Sacrificial death*, is comprised of contributions by four persons: religious studies specialist Tomikura, ethical theorist Fukawa, historian Ôhama, and folklorist Miyata, all promising scholars in their respective fields. Since in this brief review I cannot summarize the content of their work in detail, I propose for the most part to take up those aspects of each chapter that left the strongest impression.

Chapter 1, "Kenshin no sôbô" 献身の相貌 [Some characteristics of sacrificial death], was written by Ôhama. As represented in Christian martyrdom, sacrificial death is the making of oneself a sacrifice to God, and it is also related to salvation. In contrast, Ôhama describes sacrificial death in Japan as something offered by a retainer to his lord, by a child to his parent—in short, as something performed by the inferior for the superior. The author perceives in such acts, however, a sense of physical identification of the sacrificial victim with the object of his sacrifice. Therefore, though at first glance it appears to be a truly self-sacrificial death, ultimately, he says, by uniting the self with the object of the sacrifice, it functions to keep the self alive.

He adds that such sacrificial death was made into a virtue and termed "loyalty" or "filial piety" in accordance with the ethics of the time. Conversely, however, by the very fact that it is based also on a feeling of physical identity with the object, Ôhama considers that this

self-sacrificial death transcends such ethical systems and essentially rebels against their strictures.

Chapter 2, “Kenshin no foroku” 献身のフォルク [A culture of sacrifice], was written by Miyata. Here he describes human sacrifices in Japanese folklore. He says there is no conclusive evidence as to whether human sacrifice actually existed in Japan. References to it, however, persist in legends, and the fact that animal sacrifice did exist causes one to wonder if human sacrifice did not exist as well. At any rate, one cannot reject the possibility out of hand. Even Yanagita Kunio, who tended to be negative on the historicity of such occurrences, when speaking about the legends of “human pillars” buried in sacrifice within river embankments and the like, claims that these legends attest at least to the existence of a tradition that Japanese do not fear death. Miyata says that Yanagita apparently viewed the behavior of the wartime kamikaze corps as an expression of this same traditional cultural attitude toward death.

Chapter 3, “Sensō o meguru kenshin” 戦争をめぐる献身 [Self-sacrifice in war], was written by Fukawa and Ōhama. They distinguish between the stated and real motives behind documents like the “last will and testament” of kamikaze corps members or other war casualties.

Chapter 4, “Bushidō ni miru kenshin” 武士道にみる献身 [Self-sacrificial death as seen in bushido], is by Tomikura. Though the chapter title leads one to expect a general treatment of bushido, the author deals, rather, with the cases of novelist Mishima Yukio, religious studies scholar Kishimoto Hideo, and the kamikaze pilots, presenting them as products of bushido. In an analysis of the development of the kamikaze corps, Tomikura indicates that the psychology that would accept war in such a form, though considered strange by Westerners, exists more or less generally among the Japanese. He perceives modern phenomena of this kind as a development of the cultural and racial characteristics that produced the human pillar legends of chapter 2. As for Mishima Yukio and Kishimoto Hideo, Tomikura says that both of them, influenced as they were by famous classics of bushido such as *Hagakure* 葉隠 [In the shadows] and *Budō shoshinshū* 武道初心集 [Introduction to the martial arts] (both written about 1925), incorporated death into their daily plans and, having done so, lived their lives striving for a full and rich existence.

For Tomikura, the contemporary meaning of bushido death lies

in choosing a life-style of wholeness and balance while at the same time being fully sensitive to death as part of life's routine, especially in the context of today's world where consciousness of death has become so shallow and intellectualized.

A depiction in a similar vein of the coming "new concept" of sacrificial death is found in chapter 5, entitled "Arata naru kenshinzō" 新たなる献身像 [A new vision of self-sacrifice]. Here Fukawa argues the necessity for a "vision of sacrifice" that will contrast with the Japanese sacrificial death of the past. That death was for the sake of the "public welfare," but "public" then meant the state or emperor. In contrast to such a view, which was denied for a time after the war but more recently is beginning to revive with the same old meaning, Fukawa argues that what we need now is a vision of sacrifice that will locate its priorities in "the people, the home, and individual happiness."

This is the first book to say so much about sacrificial death in Japan. It will undoubtedly prove indispensable to any future discussion of the issue, as Miyata observes at the end. To a degree, certain common themes do emerge—the community-oriented ethos undergirding Japanese self-sacrificial death, for one. But there is one respect in which having specialists from different fields do the writing works to the book's disadvantage. I wish the authors had settled on a mutually acceptable general concept of sacrificial death. And I find it regrettable that, "Volk" series or no, the book contains no discussion whatever regarding the contribution of Buddhism to the matter of sacrificial death, for Buddhism cannot be left out of Japanese folk culture.

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