

Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., *The eagle and the rising sun: Americans and the new religions of Japan*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974. 224 pages. \$7.95.

Professor Ellwood's book on Japan's new religions and their propagation in America is an enjoyable addition to our knowledge of this subject. Written in a clear and popular style, the book will lend itself to use in undergraduate teaching. The best parts of the book are the lively and anecdotal sections on the development of the new religions in America. The parts dealing with Japan, while equally well written, seem to be based entirely on English-language materials and do not add much to what we have already learned from Thomsen, McFarland, Offner and van Straelen.

There are a few minor points that seem to flaw the book:

1. The reading selections from the various new religions, though well chosen, are too short to be of much value.

2. Mr. Ellwood treats the tendency of Japanese parents to take on themselves the responsibility for the sickness of their children as "an aspect of modernization" (p. 29). In fact, however, this is a traditional attitude, especially among Japanese mothers, and is related to the emotional control parents have over their children (see George DeVos, *Socialization for achievement* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973], p. 155).

3. The author associates the growth of "mystical world views" (such as those of the new religions) with "urbanizing, overpopulated societies, where opportunity for geographical expansion has been exhausted" (p. 208). This he contrasts with the Judeo-Christian type of religion that has grown out of nomadic and expansive societies.

## REVIEWS

Setting aside the question whether it is appropriate to describe the new religions together with the faiths of "Benares, Loyang, [and] Alexandria" as "mystical," I find this overpopulation-and-containment type of explanation weak when applied to Japan's new religions. What encouraged the growth of these religions was not merely overpopulation, but the unsettled economic world of the nineteenth century. Family fortunes rose and fell not in accordance with the whims of nature, but in response to the market. Traditional face-to-face relationships were replaced by more impersonal ties based on a money economy. This, coupled with the political uncertainties of nineteenth century Japan and the centuries-old mixture of high and low cultures in western Japan, provided the background of the new religions. In short, what was important about the Kinki region where most of the new religions got their start was not its overpopulation but its instability.

4. The most remarkable thing about Mr. Ellwood's book is its generous and enthusiastic attitude toward the new religions. If an author can be generous to a fault, this book is faulted indeed. I must confess that I find it difficult to see "the brightening dawn of a new world view" (p. 207) in religions which are basically a mixture of shamanism, magic, traditional ethical and spiritualistic lore, and heavy doses of public relations. In contrast to Mr. Ellwood's optimistic assessment, one can also *worry* about those Japanese and Americans who are drawn to religions that are (*mutatis mutandis*) uncritical, authoritarian, apolitical (or actually arch-conservative), fanatical, magic-oriented, highly regimented, and forever thirsting for The Simple Answer. One can also *doubt* that *mioshie*, *jōrei*, *namu myōhō renge kyō*, *oyashikiri*, or any of the other "nectarean showers" of the new religions will ever "take away the unhappiness of America."

In spite of these reservations, the book is instructive, easy to read, and may prove useful for secondary reading in classes on contemporary religions in Japan and America.

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