

Helen HARDACRE, *Lay Buddhism in Contemporary Japan: Reiyūkai Kyōdan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. xviii + 267. \$45.50.

This book deals with a major stream in the "New Religions" of Japan, the Nichiren-associated *Society of Friends of the Spirits* or Reiyūkai. Founded by Kubo Kakutarō and spread by his major female disciple Kotani Kimi, the Reiyūkai was the inspiration behind many schismatic groups, including the now prosperous Risshō Kōsei Kai. Yet this fountainhead of modern lay Buddhism in Japan has not received a single focused study in English until now. Based on years of participatory observation, Hardacre's work bears comparison with a similar participatory analysis of the Mahikari healing cult made by Winston Davis (also of the University of Chicago) in *Dōjō: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980) and may rank in similar importance. Generalizations about the New Religions are in serious need of revision and refinement. However, unlike Davis, who builds on Kitagawa's better characterization of the New Religions, Hardacre focuses upon the lesser McFarland (*The Rush Hour of the Gods*). Whereas Davis addresses the whole discipline of the sociology of religion, argues for a clarification of reductionism, and concludes

with a sharp critique of the secularization thesis, Hardacre in her greater empathy well-nigh apologizes for the *genze riyaku* (this-worldly benefits) magic, seeing in it the functionalist's "instrumental" half to what others saw solely as the "affective" side of such "crisis religions." Although in the end she only amends, instead of disproves, that thesis, the body of her book offers a new approach to the issues raised.

Indeed, the enfranchisement of the layman into what was once priestly prerogatives is the major contribution of Reiyūkai. This follows upon the ritualization—some would say, corruption—of Kamakura salvific faiths into funeral services for ancestors in the Neo-Confucian era of the Tokugawa. Kubo not only broke with, but also maintained this tradition when he legitimized the lay right to "ordinate" the dead, that is, to ascribe monks' Dharma (perceptory) names to the departed to facilitate the ancestors' transition to full *hotoke* or Buddha status. Seeking to strengthen the family ethics of the *ie* system at a time when it was being threatened by the social upheavals wrought by the Meiji era, Kubo made ancestor worship with the myriad spirits the basis of his new religion. Hardacre considers this creation of an "association" (*Gesellschaft*) based on what was originally a cult of the primary family (*Gemeinschaft*) a key innovation of this seminal movement.

Perhaps at the organizational level, the way by which the movement spread through these cells of local devotional groups indeed marks a modern departure. In practice, however, as Hardacre also knows, the Japanese ancestral worship system in the *ie* has always included non-kin members. Neo-Confucian moralists have also promoted associations based on familial virtues such as filial piety and general reverence for elders. Old Buddhist *kō* have taken care of the dead of fellow members. And general courtesy to the departed dead, such as Kubo's own concern for the descendentless *muen-botoke* goes back a long way in Buddhism. Thus what is ideologically new in Kubo's program is harder to pinpoint and that is made more difficult by the fact that Reiyūkai members do not seem to have clear ideas about what constitutes "ancestors."

One would like to know—and wonder, Hardacre's notation on the movement's anti-intellectualism notwithstanding, if there could not be indirect ways of finding out—what the exact status of the *rei* "spirits" is; what predisposes them to (benefitting) life in one group and to death (malicious harm) in another; what rationale and

means is employed to transform one to the other; what the primal attitude is—fear as in classic African cults or reverence as Confucians insist; and whether the success of the Reiyūkai after the Tokyo earthquake was not due more to the former, i.e. the old Japanese anxiety over the unquieted dead?

Perhaps in keeping with the mentality of the members she lived with, Hardacre turns away from such speculative issues. She also departs from the earlier approach of dwelling on the origin of the movement or the life of the founders. Instead she extends the more recent Japanese investigative style in concentrating on the actual day-to-day maintenance of the faith and the ongoing movement's accommodation to the changing Japanese society. Her concern is less with the crisis religion at its inception; as she notes, the movement subsisted beyond any such crisis. She does not consider the question of whether such a crisis was or was not artificially institutionalized by the religion (what Davis notes as the need-gratifying and need-creating aspect of religion). She chooses to study how the personal crises of its members were actually dealt with and resolved by the rather intense, face-to-face, *oyako* leader-led, consultation sessions that Reiyūkai spearheaded. If some of these daily problems seem very mundane to the reader, still I think in focusing on them Hardacre has kept to and captured well the tenor of this faith.

Indeed, the Reiyūkai does not presume to have the kind of grandiose utopian vision of the Sōka Gakkai and seems to resist and refuse the greater flexibility of more impersonal *hōza* "offices" adopted by its more successful, urbane offshoot, the Risshō Kōsei Kai. Hardacre also plays down the shamanistic element, preferring to present the healing miracles of Kotani, such as when she was working among her first converts (perhaps some *burakumin*), more as a consequence of simple human kindness, economic prudence, and an ethics of austerity (Weber's asceticism). In that, she strikes the right balance, for indeed it was Kubo the thinker who instilled into Kotani the virtue of penance and the power due to asceticism—instead of the other way around as in the more shamanistic Ōmotokyō or even Tenrikyō where rationalization came later.

What emerges from Hardacre's skillful retelling of such cases of crisis and resolution is something very different from, say, Davis' case book. It is not some Freudian drama of hidden demons. It is not even the standard view of the members as the newly uprooted,

faceless urban crowd, finding refuge in a new mass religion tinted somehow by folk magic. Those pictures may not be incorrect, but they are born of a "monotheistic" methodology that assumes the rational "individual" (or actor) to be the most reasonable point of departure. But that methodology becomes quite questionable here when we are dealing with an unashamedly polytheistic faith and correspondingly polytheistic personality. By retelling the cases in terms of symbiotic reactions, what Hardacre draws is a more faithful picture of "family in crisis" and a resolution of that crisis by the family as a unit--as indeed the ethos and the pneumatic theatre of Reiyūkai insists upon.

In a fuller functionalist scheme with (pardon) the standard Parsonian correlations, what Hardacre shows is that indeed the Reiyūkai affords not simply affective solace; it promises also effective programs, means to achieving aspired-for goals. Repeatedly we see how the basic social unit (the family as the action system) faces possible disintegration (*vis-à-vis* its surrounding) because of unexpected external or internal strains (sickness, business setbacks, infidelity); and how it reintegrates itself through the faith (drawing on the religious sector within the cultural system) until it can re-arm itself (as a polity) and reach a common goal--the miracles of physical and economic well-being.

Within that drama, Hardacre provides us with one of the best portraits--(not so much or not just of ancestor worship (as the book jacket stresses) but rather or more so--(of the role of woman. The woman is often the agent through whom the faith is accepted by the whole family. She is also the local leader and the backbone of the Reiyūkai. The chapter on the role of woman set against the backdrop of the changing Japanese family affords most rewarding reading for anyone interested in modern Japan or women's studies. It is irony that in this religion which would offend many a feminist, women do rise in prominence and the bilaterality of ancestors (of *both* parents) is recognized. In the Reiyūkai system the woman is supposed to apologize not only for her shortcomings, but also for the sins of a wayward spouse. She is to practice "cold water" austerity, sincerely chant and confess all sins before the family altar so as to avoid the displeasure of the ancestors. Such demonstration of her impotence in a patriarchal family is however a prelude to her transcending it. DeVos might deem this a replaying of the role of the "masochistic" mother inducing guilt (and achievement) in the male. Doi might see in this Schleiermacherean

cult of "absolute dependence" the workings of *amae*. In the politics of the family, some might even see in her appeal to (originally his lineage) ancestors an indirect route to gaining control. Hardacre, avoiding such theories, simply presents a vivid picture of the strength of such blessed meekness that rebuilds families against all adversities. The soap operatic qualities (highlighted by the testimonies which have their function in the tradition) notwithstanding, it is a human picture somewhat missing from Davis' deeper, but then, colder critique. In her empathy, Hardacre makes this seemingly anachronistic survival of primitive polytheism and archaic ethos in modern Japan appreciatively understandable.

Implicitly, Hardacre's study raises many questions about how the New Religions in their diverse plurality should be interpreted. It also makes one wonder what is the minimal requirement for religiosity, for here is a religious movement, tied indeed to the Ultimate Concern of a Nichiren faith, which, for all practical purposes and at most times, operates at a very mundane level, with an irritatingly vague idea of the Unknown and almost no theology. Like some haunt of a remnant of Shang ancestral worship mixed with primitive Shinto shadowy gods, it survives and strives, in body as well as in spirit, in our midst, a mockery of and a challenge to our concern with higher gods and neater cosmologies.

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