

Sheldon GARON, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. 313 pp. ISBN 0-691-04488-0.

IN THIS INFORMATIVE BOOK Sheldon Garon, professor of history at Princeton University, describes how the Japanese government strives to both shape the

behavior of its citizens and promote policies for the strengthening and enrichment of the nation through widely based moral suasion campaigns. Japan's strong commitment to social management, Garon contends, is the key factor in explaining how resource-poor Japan became Asia's first modern military and economic power. Garon chronicles the development of social management in Japan over the course of the twentieth century through four case studies of moral suasion campaigns by the Japanese government on matters of gender, sexuality, welfare, and religion.

Garon suggests that the Japanese government's successful management of society in the modern era rests in part "on its ability to combine the mission to modernize and Westernize everyday life with the statist objectives of extracting savings, improving the quality of the workforce, and maintaining social harmony" (p. 21). These goals have been accomplished through a series of "moral suasion" campaigns where the people were exhorted to save more money, buy fewer imports, and work harder to avoid relying on public assistance. Perhaps the key to social management is the ability of the Japanese government to obtain the enthusiastic participation of a myriad of private groups incorporating large segments of the population in its ambitious programs to manage society.

Garon's studies of women and brothels are fascinating. He demonstrates how the Japanese government, realizing the critical role women play in every aspect of society, has mobilized the millions of women who belong to local women's associations in every Japanese neighborhood as "ground troops" in campaigns to promote household saving, discourage the use of credit cards, and aid police in crime prevention. The employment of women in brothels, while discouraged today, once was seen as an important instrument for strengthening the nation. Licensed prostitutes served to satisfy the urges of husbands and thus preserved family units. They also enabled single men to forgo marriage, thus reducing their need to support families and so reducing aggregate national consumption.

Garon also deals at length with the Japanese government's prewar attempts to build a nationally supported religious and spiritual orthodoxy as an essential ingredient in its campaign to modernize and Westernize the nation. This orthodoxy "extolled patriarchal authority" (p. 83) and "traditional values of public morality and reverence for one's ruler" (p. 86). The government, led by ranking officials of the powerful Home Ministry, increasingly regarded the established religions as allies in their managerial campaigns to "improve social welfare, modernize daily habits, and ward off radical thought" (p. 66). The state received the enthusiastic support of most established religions who "called upon the state to defend their common visions of social order and public morality from the Communists... and the new religions..." (p. 87).

The "enemies" of the state in prewar Japan were those individuals and organizations that, in the opinion of the government, did not subscribe to or propagate its views of orthodoxy. These "enemies" included two large groups that sprang up among the lower classes following World War I, the liberal and socialist movements that attracted urban intellectuals and skilled workers,

and the New Religions and popular sects that appealed to small-scale farmers, peddlers, shopkeepers, and working women.

The largest New Religions, Ōmotokyō and Hitonomichi Kyōdan, had a combined membership of at least a million and smaller religions attracted thousands more. Their success stemmed from the charisma of their leaders and their claims that they could meet the worldly needs of their followers, including various forms of healing and spiritual guidance in dealing with marital problems, economic hardships, and existential crises.

Although the New Religions were quite conservative and generally supported the emperor and Japanese traditions, they incurred the wrath of many elements of Japan's "Establishment." Traditional religious groups demanded the end of the New Religions because the new faiths had eroded their membership and financial bases. The educated elite and the popular press decried the "superstitious" tendencies and backward nature of the New Religions and the popular press encouraged increased public opposition with lurid stories of orgies, mass hypnotic trances, and underground torture chambers.

The Home Ministry's Special Higher Police had been so effective in eradicating the underground Communist Party and related groups in the 1920s that by the mid-1930s it had little to do and faced the prospect of drastic retrenchment unless it could find another enemy to attack. "Suddenly, previously harmless sects became 'evil cults,' which could only be controlled by His Majesty's [newly formed] Religions Police" (p. 79).

Home Ministry officials, many of whom were graduates of Japan's elite universities, decried the New Religions for "denying the rationality of modern science" and "worshipping superstition and absolute nonsense" (p. 81). They regarded themselves as professional bureaucrats responsible for preventing social unrest by repression and the imposition of "positive social policies" (p. 82).

The strong condemnation of the New Religions by Japan's elite both within and outside the government gave the state the needed rationale to launch an intense campaign to destroy Ōmotokyō, Hitonomichi Kyōdan, and other sects in the mid-1930s. The leaders of the New Religions were jailed, their assets were seized, and their property was destroyed.

Sheldon Garon concludes his study of the prewar religious situation by noting the irony that the support by the established religions of the government's suppression of the New Religions paved the way for the state's wartime assertion of a rigid state dogma based on State Shinto and its concurrent oppressive management of the activities of all religious associations.

Garon notes that in contrast with other areas, the postwar relationship between religions and the state represents a complete rupture with the pre-surrender past. The Allied Occupation very effectively severed the ties between the government and religious organizations, who received a powerful guarantee of autonomy from official interference.

The constitutional and legislative guarantees of the freedom of religion paved the way for the rapid rise of New Religions in the postwar era. The Liberal Democratic Party and other conservative groups made sporadic attempts to weaken the separation of state and religion and to revive aspects of State Shinto, as in the case of efforts by the government to reinstate gov-

ernment support for the Yasukuni Shrine. These attempts by the government to resuscitate the prewar style of spiritual management all failed, however, because of determined opposition by progressives and the New Religions and by a lack of public interest in this question (pp. 206–11).

Taking up a similar theme, Professor David O'BRIEN (1996) of the University of Virginia has presented an analysis of the Japanese government's control of the nation's judicial system and the role of the courts in supporting the state's conservative religious agenda to demonstrate that the prewar methodology of state spiritual management has made a partial return. O'Brien studies the struggle between conservative and progressive forces to advance their various political-cultural agendas through a series of law suits in Japan's courts. O'Brien notes that whereas the United States innovated an independent judiciary as an essential component of democracy, the Japanese judicial system lacks a tradition of substantive independence. It has never overturned any law, policy, or practice supported by the conservative elite that has governed almost uninterrupted since 1948. Indeed, the judiciary has shown a conspicuous propensity for "deferring to the government and reinforcing traditional cultural values and norms" (p. 23).¹ Since conservative forces invariably win the cases, progressives have taken to initiating suits to garner publicity and new supporters.

If one follows the logic of O'Brien's shrewd analysis, the Aum incident presents the conservative establishment with yet another opportunity to encroach on the civil liberties of Japanese in the name of public order. Garon supports this thesis by noting that the move to revise the Religious Corporations Law received broad public backing as well as a political alliance between conservatives and leftists that "bore a remarkable resemblance to the coalition of bureaucrats and secular progressives who supported the state's campaigns to manage and suppress new sects during the interwar era" (p. 214). Garon quotes Liberal Democratic Party secretary-general Katō Kōichi as follows: "It's OK for religious organizations to be interested in politics, especially issues like human rights, peace, and social welfare, but when they get into the core of public power, it's another story. We have to protect our authority of government from the dominance of a specific religious organization" (p. 214). Garon concludes by noting that although it is much too early to tell whether the amended law signals a return to substantial government controls over religious groups, "yet another of the Occupation's efforts to check Japanese propensities to manage society is under attack" (p. 215).

O'Brien's study demonstrates the fallacy of Garon's assertion that Japanese conservatives before Aum failed completely in their attempts to reassert state authority over religion. Garon also perhaps overemphasizes the degree of change brought by the 1995 revision of the Religious Corporation Law. There are some important technical changes, but the thrust of the original

¹ Moreover, "the Supreme Court and the lower courts almost invariably reinforce the government's position out of seemingly purblind deference." The courts, O'Brien observes, do not "function as an independent judiciary, and merely follow the dictates of the administrative judgement" (1996, p. 135).

law is unchanged. Garon also strongly implies that the Sōka Gakkai is the only new religious group strongly involved in politics, when in fact other new religious groups have also been active, generally in support of the LDP.

Garon's *Molding Japanese Minds* is both a meticulously researched and well-written scholarly work and a superb analysis of the intricate relationship between the state and Japanese civil society. His key contribution is to show the reader how state and society interact as partners on a daily basis for the perceived good of the nation rather than behaving as hostile dichotomous units.

Reference

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