Book Reviews and Notes

Reviews

New Wine: The Cultural Shaping of Japanese Christianity
David Reid
Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1991. 199 + xipp.

Reviewed by Thomas DEAN, Tokyo

DAVID REID'S STUDY of Christianity in Japan focuses on the general question, How does a religion change as it moves from one culture to another? His particular interest is the influence of traditional Japanese culture on the American version of Protestant Christianity that came to Japan in the nineteenth century.

The primary focus of his concern is what Reid calls "the stubborn problem of the relationship between religion and state power." His opening essay is an overview of the two thousand year "unity of religion and government" tradition in Japan. The chief antagonist in this drama is "the hitherto alien value of government neutrality in respect of religion," the "separation of religion and state" principle introduced in the American-inspired post-war constitution of Japan only fifty years ago.

In a second chapter on religion and state in Japan from 1965 to 1990, Reid analyzes recent court cases to see whether there is a trend in the relation between "religion" (individual religiosity embodied in the constitutional principle of religious freedom) and "state" (government-supported community religiosity embodied in public Shinto rites). Has the 1945 shift to a legal code underwriting religious freedom and separation of religion and state ended the tradition of religion and government unity?

Reid's case studies reveal that, while legal precedents for the separation principle are found in lower court rulings, "Every case that has gone as far as the Supreme Court has resulted in a legal precedent that buttresses the traditional unity position." [It should be noted that after Reid's book went to press the Supreme Court ruled on September 25, 1991, that official visits of the emperor or prime minister to the Yasukuni Shrine violate the constitutional separation of government and religion. This ruling sets a precedent that may well influence future shrine visits by public officials and pending suits involving the separation of state and religion.]

In a chapter on the applicability of Western theories of secularization to Japanese Christianity, Reid again focuses on church-state relationships. His case study is the internal division within the Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan between 1967 and 1970 over the church's relation to state power and social authority. The dispute exposed a conflict within Japanese Christianity between two norms similar to the opposing views of religion-state relation: a "state-over-religion" position (the traditional Japanese norm) and a "neutral state/pluralistic-religion" position (the imported American norm).

Reid concludes that Western theories of secularization cannot be applied without qualification to Christianity in Japan. Such theories, generated from Euro-American models, leave out the dimension of "cultural specificity." It is difficult to transplant such a theory "from a cultural context where religious adherence is exclusive to one where it is not."

On the other hand, one of the clearest examples of the cultural reshaping of Japanese Christianity is found in the phenomenon that is Reid's other major concern in these essays. This is the relationship between traditional Japanese ancestral rites and Japanese Christian attitudes and behavior toward the dead. Here, more unambiguously than in the case of the religion-state relationship, we see what Reid terms the "indigenization" of Japanese Protestantism.

In the first of two chapters on this subject, "Remembering the Dead" (a phrase Reid prefers to the Western term "ancestor worship"), Reid distinguishes between funeral customs brought by nineteenth century American Protestants to Japan, in which the interval between death and the life ahead is relatively short, and traditional Japanese customs, which involve extended rituals both linear (anniversary memorials extending up to thirty-three years) and cyclical (grave visits on the spring and fall equinoxes, and the late-summer visit of the spirits of the dead), at the end of which the dead finally become "ancestors."

What happened when these two different traditions met in the development of Japanese Protestantism? First, Japanese Christians already in the nineteenth century began to accommodate to traditional Japanese funeral practices. Today, "Japanese Protestantism, both familial and ecclesiastical, includes prolonged post-funeral mortuary rites, both linear and cyclical."

Second, and perhaps more surprising, in the relationship among ecclesiastical "households" ("main" churches and their "branches") and in annual memorial services for the founders of Japanese Christian churches and schools, "both structurally and ritually, contemporary Japanese Protestantism receives important influences from the *ie* system" –)the extended family system that supports and requires extended ancestral rituals.

In his second essay on this topic, "Japanese Christians and the Ancestors," Reid looks at two groups within both Christian and non-Christian Japanese – those with and those without traditional household altars. He discovers that the ancestral rite behavior of Japanese Christians with a *butsudan* is more like that of Japanese non-Christians with a *butsudan* than it is like that of fellow-Christians without household altars. It would appear that Protestant Christianity, despite its relatively brief career in Japan, has in this area of behavior been dramatically reshaped by traditional Japanese religio-cultural practices. But, equally interesting, this difference among Japanese Christians with regard to "culturally expected" ritual behavior in funeral practices is not reflected in differences among Japanese Christians as concerns "behavior generally expected of Christians," e. g., church-going and Bible-reading.

Reid's conclusion is two-fold. "Mainline Protestantism as found in Japan today has changed considerably," especially in areas of culturally expected ritual behavior that can be interpreted as not incompatible with Christian belief. It has become distinctively *Japanese* Christianity. But in areas of religious behavior generally expected of Christians, the differences between Christians and non-Christians remain. It continues to be Japanese *Christianity*.

One question we might raise is, Why does Reid focus his overview of the history of Japanese religions on the relation of religion to state power? Given that such an approach highlights a fundamental dimension of the Japanese religious tradition, does it leave out something more essential for understanding the spiritual truth and power of that tradition? Might there be a spiritual strength in its community-oriented, cultural-unity type of religiosity that is overlooked by viewing its history from the perspective of what is presumably Reid's own commitment to an individual-oriented, cultural-pluralistic model of religiosity?

On the other hand, Japanese Christians have from the outset been critical of their own culture and sensitive to the plight of those on the margins of state or social power. Reid's focus on the relation of religion to state power is thus not only a novel perspective on the history of Japanese religions, it also serves as a challenge to the apparent lack of social and political critique in Shinto and Buddhist responses to state power and social injustice—areas in which Japanese Christianity, despite its internal divisions, has spoken with a prophetic voice.

This observation must be balanced, however, by Reid's own findings on the relation of Japanese Christianity to traditional ancestral rituals in which Japanese Protestantism has shown a strong tendency to accommodate itself to "culturally expected behavior." One of the most surprising results of his investigations was that Japanese Christians, even more than Japanese non-Christians, were inclined to view the Shinto shrine and its public festivals, in contradistinction to Buddhism and Christianity, as not "religious." In a related finding the number of Japanese Christians supporting the emperor system ranged between 45 percent and 55 percent, figures almost identical to their Japanese non-Christian counterparts.

Thus a second question we might raise is, How does Reid propose to relate these two aspects of the cultural shaping of Japanese Christianity? Further, why does he apparently have a different attitude toward each? He is extremely sensitive to, and on guard against, the possible reshaping of Japanese Christianity by the Japanese tradition of unity of religion and state. But he appears to pass no normative judgment against the reshaping of Japanese Christianity by traditional Japanese attitudes to ancestral rites, Shinto public festivals, and the emperor system. Is it because one poses the external threat of state power to religious freedom, whereas the other is simply voluntary behavior in the area of social custom?

Whatever his answers, Reid's essays open up new ways of looking at such fundamental and enduring relationships as those between religion and culture, church and state, individual and family, the living and the departed, ritual and belief, Christianity and other religions, the "worlds" of Japan and America, Asia and the West. For readers similarly fascinated by these issues, this is a book with which they should make friends.

[Editor's note: a shorter version of this review first appeared in *The Japan Times*, March 24, 1992, p. 18.]

Religion in Contemporary Japan
Ian Reader
London: Macmillan Press, 1991. 277pp.

Reviewed by Ernest D. PIRYNS, Tokyo

THIS WELL-CONCEIVED STUDY of contemporary Japanese religiosity is based on years of research, personal observations, and previously published articles. The author has succeeded in giving us a coherent picture of Japanese religious consciousness and practice. Reader's starting point is interesting and concrete. Rather than focusing on philosophical beliefs or theologies, he examines the actions people perform in religious contexts and considers the extent to which