



**G. Clinton Godart, *Darwin, Dharma, and the Divine: Evolutionary Theory and Religion in Modern Japan***

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THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE on religion and science has been heavily shaped by John Draper and Andrew White's late nineteenth-century conflict thesis, which asserts that religion and science are antagonistic endeavors. New atheists, such as Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, typically point out the Scopes Monkey Trial and its aftermath to argue this conflict will eventually lead to the victory of science over religion. Historians and religious studies scholars argue against this surface characterization and offer in its place the complexity thesis (FERNGREN 2002). Like Erik HAMMERSTROM's (2015) work on Buddhism and science in twentieth-century China, G. Clinton Godart's *Darwin, Dharma, and the Divine* fills a lacuna in this conversation by drawing attention away from Christianity's relationship with the theory of evolution in the West. This monograph examines how Darwin's ideas were received in Japan. It was not a passive acceptance, but, rather, an active engagement that influenced Japanese biology, religion, philosophy, politics, literature, economic theory, military action, *kokutai* 国体 ideology, and national identity.

Godart writes against misconceptions of Japan having no major issues in adapting the theory of evolution (*shinkaron* 進化論)—not just biological, but also social and cosmic—because it has never been a predominantly Christian nation. His main thesis—the fear that the theory of evolution implied a materialist world and cruel state of nature drove “religious thinkers, philosophers, and biologists to actively engage with evolutionary theory, and find goodness, harmony, beauty, and the divine *within* nature and evolution itself” (6)—is sustained and convincingly argued throughout the volume. Though evolution was mostly taken as fact by the Japanese, they heavily debated and negotiated the implications and interpretations of the theories of evolution; which exact version was most accurate was also contested. For example, the influential primatologist Imanishi Kinji criticized Darwin's mechanism of natural selection that emphasized individual competition and instead advocated subspecies societies of cooperation.

The book is careful to note the multiple “*relations* between *theories* of evolution and *religions*, or different proponents of religions” (8). By religion, Godart is mainly engaging with the ideas of Buddhism, Shinto, Christianity, and to a lesser extent Confucianism and even Daoism. The focus is on arguments made

by individuals, not institutions, clergy, or ritual practice aspects of religion. He provides lengthy translations of Japanese intellectuals throughout the work, acknowledging the limitation that these individuals were all educated males. He also makes explicit how the term “religion” itself is problematic in the Japanese context, paying careful attention to neologisms, anachronisms, and contexts of translation and transmission. For instance, the political debates of the Meiji Restoration impacted Katō Hiroyuki’s translation of the “struggle for survival” as *jakuniku kyōshoku* 弱肉強食 (the stronger eat the weaker) and *yūshō reppai* 優勝劣敗 (the strong win, the weak lose) (46). The problem of how to define an “individual” (*kotai* 个体), a newly imported term, in contrast to society was one faced by biologists, social scientists, and philosophers (47).

My gripe is that kanji is only used a few times on one page (32) in the entire book. Its presence in the main text would allow readers of Japanese, Chinese, or Korean to immediately understand terms that may have homophones. There is no appendix or glossary. Kanji does not appear in the footnotes, index, or bibliography. Presses sometimes justify the avoidance of Asian scripts to cut costs and for fear of intimidating nonspecialists. Given improved printing technology, editing and typesetting software, how much is being saved at the price of readability for much of the audience of such texts? I am not convinced there is compelling evidence that the presence of kanji is any more off-putting than the presence of Latin or Greek for most readers. Even if this were the case, should presses with reputations for material related to East Asia not actively make such scripts more commonplace? This complaint is directed towards an unfortunate trend in publishing, and not at the author of this fine work.

It requires a firm command of religion, philosophy, and biology to present this intellectual history. Godart carefully explains the ideas of Darwin, Kropotkin, Hobbes, Schopenhauer, Kyoto school philosophers such as Nishida, and more. This is important because Darwin is so often misread, misunderstood, or conflated with Spencer or Huxley, as evidenced by some Japanese intellectuals who feared that evolution implicated a lack of ethics. The volume has six balanced chapters arranged chronologically and thematically, starting with the Meiji period and ending with the postwar period. Highlights include the attempts to reconcile evolution and *mappō* 末法 (84–87); Inoue Enryō’s interpretation of Buddhist karma as genetic heredity (88); the split between socialist “advocates of gradual change and proponents of violent revolution [with b]oth groups appeal[ing] to evolutionary theory to make their case” (126); the Catholic priest Iwashita Sōichi advising the prohibition of teaching evolution in schools to obviate students questioning if the emperor’s ancestors were apes (160); the public image of Emperor Hirohito as head Shinto priest, ritual farmer, and biologist who planted and harvested rice himself as part of research (182–85); Imanishi using Buddhist terminology in his biology, such as Kannon’s embrace of nature

(223); and the influence of evolution on Tezuka Osamu's manga, Miyazawa Kenji's poetry, Ishiwara Kanji and the Manchurian Incident, and new religious movements such as Soka Gakkai.

What Godart shows is the multiple and creative (mis-)uses of theories of evolution by individuals with various agendas, since scientific theories are never neutral or value-free. They are presented and propagated in the world through particular lenses and interpreted in different ways. The implications of scientific theories, especially evolution, continue to be highly contested. I strongly recommend *Darwin, Dharma, and the Divine* for general audiences and graduate or upper-level undergraduate courses that cover Japanese history, religion, and science, and how the engagement between the latter two forces "shaped much of Japan's modern intellectual history and changed Japanese understandings of nature, society, and the sacred" (6).

#### REFERENCES

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