

is so far actually adequately understood in the West – and *even* among Buddhologists. Thus the volume’s implicit correction against Shin influence seems to put the cart a considerable ways before the horse. In any case the authors would have done better to deal with this major issue openly.

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Monika Schrimpf

*Zur Begegnung des japanischen Buddhismus mit dem Christentum in der Meiji-Zeit (1868-1912).*

Wiesbaden: Harassowitz Verlag 2000.

As one who has had the privilege of studying the dramatic interactions between Buddhism and Christianity in the latter half of the nineteenth century (*Buddhism and Christianity in Japan*, University of Hawaii Press 1987), I enjoyed reading Monika Schrimpf’s analysis of Buddhist encounters with Christianity in the Meiji period. Our books inevitably cover much of the same history and to a great extent use the same material. However, since her concern is primarily to investigate the religious encounter as part of a Buddhist “Geistesgeschichte,” with particular emphasis on the causes, motives and contents of the Buddhist attitudes to Christianity, she is able to leave space for a more detailed presentation of institutions, movements, and literature on the Buddhist side.

The structure of the book is divided in four: A brief introduction describes central aspects of anti-Christian attitudes of Buddhists in the Tokugawa period. The second chapter deals with the Buddhist criticism of Christianity in the first part of the Meiji period (until the early 1890s), with emphasis on the rejection of Christianity as incompatible with patriotic values as well as with modern science and philosophy. The third chapter analyses the rapprochement between Buddhists and Christians in the later Meiji period, with emphasis on the Parliament of Religions in Chicago (1893); the Japanese Religious Conference in 1896, and the series of inter-religious organizations and conferences that followed; and the various Buddhist movements to establish a “New Buddhism” in the same period.

The book is well-written and balanced in its evaluations, and certainly adds to the understanding of Buddhist apologetics and reform movements in the period, and in that way broadens the understanding of changes in attitudes to Christianity.

The strength of the book, its focus on the Buddhist side of the relationship, however, is perhaps also the reason for some of its weaknesses. I will limit myself to a few points. Christianity and its role for the development of Buddhism are of course present in Schrimpf’s book, but the focus on Buddhism seems to weaken the understanding of the enormous impact Christianity made on Meiji Buddhism, not only as a challenge creating anxiety, aggression, and reactionary apologetics, but also in terms of reform, renewal, and new energy. Christianity came as a vigorous religion regarding itself as the spiritual backbone of the West, representing

civilization, enlightenment, and progress, and encountered a Buddhism that was in such a serious crisis that the missionaries – along with the Japanese intellectual and political elites – ignored it as a potential spiritual force, at least initially. Paradoxically enough, the beginning of Buddhist renewal was not the reform movements in the later Meiji, but rather the desperate reactions in the early Meiji, when Buddhism tried to fortify itself against the threat of Christianity, establishing educational institutions for Buddhist studies *and* Western and Christian studies, and realizing the need for radical reforms. The anti-Christian activity and apologetics somehow prepared Buddhists for more friendly relationships, just as Christians' apologetic study of Buddhism prepared Christians for new attitudes and relationships. In brief, the Buddhist investigation of Western traditions and its attempts to come to terms with modernity were to a great extent an expression of its encounter with Christianity.

Another result of Schrimpf's focus on the Buddhist "Geistesgeschichte" seems to be a limitation of the scope to a few aspects of the attitudes to Christianity, primarily the anti-Christian writings in early Meiji, and the conferences and reform movements in later Meiji. In that way some of the dynamism of the wider context in the period does not seem to receive sufficient attention, such as the international relationships (treaties, Westernization, Japanese explorations of Western learning), political unrest, Japanese military aggression (wars with China and Russia), social changes, and ideological challenges.

Let me add a minor complaint. I have always wondered why historians still use such artificial periodization as Meiji, Taishō and Shōwa, etc. The Meiji restoration (1868) was admittedly an important transition, but the vital changes in Buddhist relationships to Christianity was primarily influenced by other types of transitions, as Schrimpf's own study shows.

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Ama, Toshimaro

*Why Are the Japanese Non-Religious? Japanese Spirituality: Being Non-Religious in a Religious Culture.*

Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005. 90 pp. (Originally *Nihonjin naze mushūkyō na no ka.* Tokyo: Chikuma shoten, 1996)

Toshimaru Ama is a well-known scholar of religion, and this 2005 English translation is a rendition of a Japanese language best-seller from 1996. Publishing in Japan, like American publishing, contains quantities of spirituality books for a general readership, and writings like Ama's perhaps represent in their own context roughly something like what the journalist William Moyers represents in the United States, i.e. middlebrow, liberal discussion of religion for broad audiences.

A big difference of course is the societies under examination. Ama is addressing a long-established issue which marks Japan: what does it mean that the Japanese

show to a relatively weak extent the kind of distinctly organized religious life (“revealed religion” in Ama’s special usage, which includes Buddhism and Christianity) which is often characteristic of other parts of the world? What does it mean that they are instead persistently dominated by various kinds of non-religious “natural religion” (shrine religion and common ritual/custom)? And why does the non-religious position often include an active dislike of the religious position?

In handling this classic problematic, the text’s five chapters range or jump loosely in free essay style over many disparate topics, including the pervasiveness of local customs and rituals, Pure Land Buddhism, Confucianism, Ihara Saikaku, funeral Buddhism, ancestor religion, the construction of State Shinto (which distorted natural religion and generated a field of severe legal ambiguities), the disappointment of modern reform attempts in Shin Buddhism, folklorist Yanagita Kunio, the pressure towards conformist “ordinariness” reinforced by natural religion, folk practice in Okinawa, and the modern Shin myokonin Genza.

Amidst this eclecticism, Ama’s most fundamental attitude is derived from Jodo-shinshu (True Pure Land) Buddhism, which is definitely a type of “revealed” religion. Some of Ama’s other works are specifically concerned with Shin Buddhist social activism, and (as the original Japanese text reveals more clearly). Ama’s approach is influenced by the large body of liberal modernist Buddhist reflection on religious tradition. Ama bookends his text with statements which express the kind of criticism of dominant Japanese consciousness which is characteristic of serious Buddhists:

... the majority of Japanese dislike revealed religion, not because they are uncomfortable with the teachings themselves, but because they lack the courage to find true meaning in life through such religions. After experiencing enough sadness, pain or depression, most people do not want to have their feelings stirred up any more, even though religion seems to delve into the meaning of life at a much deeper level. In this sense, being non-religious is an expression of self-protection against dealing with one’s true self. Natural religion does not require the question ‘Who am I?’” (p. 8-9)

It amazes me that the majority of the Japanese people have either avoided (or favored) the word ‘non-religious’ for more than a hundred years, which I think is very strange and even appalling. I believe that religion, not only Christianity but also organized Japanese Buddhism, gives us a fundamental perspective on this life and that this perspective starts only when we truly realize our own limitations. (p 83)

Still in most other places the discussion, at least in translation, also seems to convey the contrasting, neutral feeling that most people in Japan get along well enough with their longstanding non-religiousness. Indeed, the majority of Japanese may be “healthy-minded” (inwardly spiritually unconflicted) in the classic sense of William James. (p. 80) Indeed, the revealed religions are to some extent guilty of turning away the larger public by their rigidity or aggressiveness.

Because of this contrast, reader of Ama in English may be left with an unsatisfying perception of inconsistency between his sense of criticism and his sense of acceptance towards religiosity in his country, an apparent ambivalence which

makes it at first hard to locate, on the basis of the translation, exactly what kind of self-understanding is finally being encouraged. A check of the original Japanese text, however, displays a considerably less ambiguous quality: allusions and terms which seem elliptical and thin when rendered in English are fully semantically networked and rich in Japanese, with the results that Ama's implicit critical Buddhist standpoint becomes far more lucid. Space does not allow an exploration of the numerous points of linguistic difficulty involved, but in sum this translation seems to be another example where a straightforward rendering of a text aimed at a Japanese audience cannot have anywhere near the same resonance or communicative success for an English language readership.

One final general observation: it can be noted that Ama strikingly has virtually nothing to say (in either the Japanese or English texts) about any of the disputed new religions, for example either Aum Shinrikyo or the Soka Gakkai. This choice is consistent with the fact that (at least in this little book) Ama's mildness does not reflect the more deeply worried sense manifested by many other up-to-the minute observers (opinions compiled in English for example in John Nathan's recent *Japan Unbound* (2004)) that contemporary Japanese society – at least in part because of its lack of significant consensus around existentially serious matters – may be at the moment considerably more volatile and fragile than is commonly realized. Whether Ama despite his reasonably critical Shin spirit is overlooking a more profound crisis in Japanese religious life or not, only time will tell.

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Emi Mase-Hasegawa

*Spirit of Christ Inculturated: A Theological Theme Implicit in Shusaku Endo's Literary Works.*

Center for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University, 2004.

Christianity's missionary encounter with the cultural 'other' continues to be revisioned in light of wider debates about Eurocentrism, orientalism, colonial practice, and such essentialized dichotomies as monotheism versus polytheism. The religious pluralism of John Hick and others gains salience in this increasingly timely enterprise. Shusaku Endo (1923-1996), a Japanese novelist who became inspired by Hick's work, presents a case where such revisioning takes the form of literary reflection on the broader cultural and historical issues implicit in one's religious conversion. Endo witnesses the trials of a Christian community as it assimilates its adopted faith in light of indigenous sensibilities. This context of Christian inculturation within the religious milieu of Japan is the focus of a doctoral dissertation, *Spirit of Christ Inculturated*, by Emi Mase-Hasegawa. Recently published through the Center for Theology and Religious Studies at Lund University, the study examines Endo's literary corpus as the embodiment of an evolving "implicit theology" of inculturation.