

NAUMANN, NELLY. *Die einheimische Religion Japans. Teil 2: Synkretistische Lehren und religiöse Entwicklungen von der Kamakura — bis zum Beginn der Edo-Zeit* [Japan's Indigenous religion. Part 2: Syncretistic doctrines and religious developments from the Kamakura period to the beginning of the Edo period]. Handbuch der Orientalistik, Abt. V, Band IV, i. Abschnitt, Teil 2. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994. xi + 264 pages. Bibliography, index. Cloth G150.00/US\$85.75; ISBN 90-04-10178-0; ISSN 0921-5239.

Let the reader be warned: this review is written by a nonspecialist in the history of Japan's "native religion." I will, therefore, leave it to others to judge the accuracy of the historical details and textual interpretations with which the book abounds, and concentrate instead on some of the questions about Japanese religion that the book is apt to evoke in the reader.

This work is the second part of a three-volume series on Japan's native religion. Part 1, which appeared in 1988, carried the subtitle "Till the End of the Heian Period," while part 3, scheduled for the near future, will bear the subtitle "From the Edo Period up to the Present." Since part 1 was reviewed in *Asian Folklore Studies* 51 (355-57), I shall not consider it here (although I cannot refrain from remarking that the two volumes now in print constitute a history of "Shinto" in the German language that, to the best of my knowledge, has no counterpart in English or perhaps in any other European language).

The present volume consists of three parts. Part 1, "Syncretic Theories and Systems," treats the first appearances of the *honji suijaku* (original state and manifestation) theory, wherein the Japanese gods are represented as avatars of Buddhas and bodhisattvas; the nature of Ise's Watarai Shinto; and the ultimate reversal of the *honji suijaku* relationship, especially in Yoshida Shinto. Part 2, "The Gods of the Medieval Tradition," analyzes the image of the gods as expressed in the *engi* (temple origin stories), Noh plays, and other legends of the time. Part 3, "Religion and the Everyday," gathers information from various sources to form a picture of how ordinary people related to the gods. My major questions have to do with the relationship of the ideas and practices described in this third part to the writings analyzed in the two earlier parts.

On the very first page of the book the author warns us that, since she does not treat the development of Buddhism in Japan, "the reader will look in vain for data on the cult of the dead or on ancestor veneration, since these are completely indebted to Buddhism" (ix). The Buddhism referred to here is, of course, the Buddhism that was introduced into Japan, but even so Naumann's statement is a bit too emphatic. Is it really so clear that Japanese native religiosity had nothing to do with ancestor veneration, and that among the different ideologies that reached Japan from China it was Buddhism (rather than, say, Confucianism) that was responsible for Japan's subsequent ancestor cult?

Parts 1 and 2, with their useful textual analyses and explanations of the *honji suijaku* theory, are abundantly documented — no surprises here. However, the author picks up a few twists of the *honji suijaku* theory that are not, I think, so generally acknowledged.

The [*engi*] legends posit, in the end, only one essential trait as common to all the gods: as manifestations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, the gods are full of compassion and pity for all suffering creatures. (124)

In whatever form the gods appear in these and other legends, Buddhist representations and concerns stand in the foreground. Everywhere the "true will" of the gods consists solely in leading human beings and also all other living beings to salvation. (111)

This suggests that no malevolent or ambiguous gods survived the Buddhist baptism. The trait of compassion is then further highlighted in the process whereby the Buddhas and

bodhisattvas become gods, which necessitates that they first become human beings in our world of suffering and experience human misery for themselves (89–93, 108–11, 122). It is then said, in a kind of refrain, that they must “temper their splendor and assimilate themselves to the dust” (20, 122, 140). A veritable “kenosis” appears to be necessary to reach godhood. In this context, the admirable idea is advanced that “inner purity” or mercy is more important than cultic purity (55, 106–108). One almost hears echoes of the Jewish prophets.

In the two quotations above, we encounter the same ambiguity with regard to acts of mercy that is found in much present-day Buddhist parlance. Are true acts of mercy only those that lead to salvation (Nirvana) or can they also involve the alleviation of this-worldly needs (thus providing worldly benefits [*genze riyaku*])? In the *Shintōshū* [Collection of divine workings] (ca. 1355) we find a wonderful combination (reconciliation) of the two. To the question, “Which profits do the gods work for us?” the answer is, “The gods bestow a double profit, one far and one near. They bestow the near profit, namely, peace and quiet in the present life, on the basis of the *suijaku*, and the far profit, namely, what is good for the afterlife, on the basis of the promise emanating from the *honji*” (91–92). The gods here seem to effect a more holistic salvation than the one often preached in an overly spiritualistic Buddhism. On the other hand, the author quotes from the *Shasekishū* the story of a god who is sad and embarrassed when a monk asks him to provide sustenance for his old mother, but recovers his good mood when the monk changes tack and asks him to help his mother to a happy afterlife (109).

Naumann also remarks that, under influence of Buddhism, the gods (as they appear in the legends) became much more anthropomorphic: “The gods came much nearer to human beings in their needs; they became more human in general, endowed now with individual traits” (122; cf. 83, 108, 124–26, 207).

This picture of the gods raises some questions. The first has to do with the motivation behind the origin of the *honji suijaku* theory. Who stood in most need of this theory, the Shinto people (or the Shinto side of the Japanese psyche), so that the worship of the native gods might be legitimated, or the Buddhists (especially the monks), so that their indulgence in kami worship might be justified, their Buddhism notwithstanding? There were apparently benefits for both sides, but the legends quoted in Naumann’s book certainly document the need of the monks to legitimate their shrine visits, something to which they seemed irresistibly attracted as Japanese.

The second question may be a more basic one. From the documents quoted in parts 1 and 2 it seems that, by about the end of the Kamakura period, the Japanese image of the kami had changed drastically and assumed a predominantly Buddhist character. Is this believable? I do not doubt the depth of Buddhist influence in general — on some points, as with the notion of karma, it must have been overwhelming, and Naumann can write, “In the *Konjaku monogatari*, 200 years after the *Yamato monogatari*, the Buddhist idea of karmic retribution had taken full possession of the general way of thinking” (88–89). There are, however, two things that make me skeptical of Naumann’s presentation of the kami. First, I do not have the impression that the kami image of the present-day Japanese is so clearly Buddhist-dominated. Or is it perhaps the case that the Meiji government’s policy of separating Buddhism and Shinto succeeded in reversing the tide? Second, in Naumann’s part 3, especially where she treats the “religiously motivated usage” of ordinary villagers, there is no mention anymore of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, nor of gods as avatars of these Buddhist entities (with the possible exception of the popular blending of the road god with Jizō [199]). I might therefore be excused for suspecting that the literature of the legends and Noh dramas, written mostly or exclusively by monks, is not really representative of the ideas of the people.

The author herself indicates that, in the legends, there appear from time to time such gods as the kettle god or hearth god “who do not fit at all in the company of exalted deities of which the legends otherwise speak” (95); she thereupon refers to these as “simple folk gods” or “gods of popular belief.” More intriguing still is the fact that medieval texts appear to recognize the existence of “real” (*jitsu*) gods beside the avatar (*gon*); these apparently were

gods who kept their native character and whose veneration was said to entail dire consequences (12, 92–93, 122–23). Naumann opines that these “real gods” must indicate the “folk gods” of which she spoke earlier, but could they not also represent, for instance, the deities of Shinto shrines that resisted incorporation into Buddhism?

Lack of space prevents me from touching on several other interesting topics found in the book, such as the taboo on anything Buddhist at the Ise shrines (“courtesy to the gods present there” [19, 34, 96–101]), the ingenious evasions of the Buddhist precept against killing (101–106), and the idea of the human as a “divine being” (32–34, 53, 79, 133). But permit me a last short comment on the struggle for a Japanese self-image as seen in these medieval texts. In the Buddhist scheme, of course, Japan is an outlying land on the periphery of a cosmos that has India (and China) as its center (93), and a country whose gods are “derivative.” In the *Yōtenki* (a text of 1223), for example, it is said that the Buddha could not directly fulfill his mission in the little country of Japan and had therefore to manifest himself as the god Sannō (8). In the same texts, however, one finds the idea that Japan has a very special character as the “land of the gods,” with religion and state comprising a single body. This idea appears to have become especially strong after the Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281 (47, 119). Seen in this perspective, there can be no doubt about which side will capture the popular imagination; it is not surprising that Kitabatake Chikafusa (1293–1354) already declares Japan to be the real center of the universe and turns the *honji suijaku* relationship of Buddhas and gods upside down.

To mention a few little flies in the ointment, I was surprised to find Hōnen transported to Mt. Kōya (21), and to learn that there is a “Buddhist creation story” (100). Otherwise the author and publisher are to be congratulated for this beautiful edition, which is practically free of typos and features an exhaustive index. It is regrettable, however, that the available printing techniques did not permit the inclusion of more Chinese characters into the text.

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CHINA

BÄCKER, JÖRG, Translator and Editor. *Märchen aus der Mandchurei*. Die Märchen der Weltliteratur. München: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1988. 285 pages. Frontispiece, glossary, important motifs and topics, bibliography. Hardcover, ISBN 3-424-00939-3. (In German)

On the desk in front of me is, of course, the volume under review. However, also on my desk just now is another book, *Malaiische Märchen*, edited by Paul Hambruch in Jena and printed in Gothic type in the year 1922. Both of these beautiful volumes belong to the series Die Märchen der Weltliteratur, initiated by Friederich von der Leyen. Sixty-six years separate the publication of these two books, during which time the Second World War forced Eugen Diederich's publishing house to move from Jena to the West. Yet the publication of tales was never interrupted. *Malaiische Märchen* is not the first volume of the series, however; the first was *Volksmärchen der Deutschen*, which appeared in 1912. Nor is *Märchen aus der Mandchurei* the latest, since under Dr. Hans-Jörg Uther (of the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* in Göttingen) the series has been growing by two or three volumes a year.

Over the decades the series has acted just like a folktale: it knows no limits of time or space. The tales of ancient Egypt meet storytellers from present-day Madagascar, Arabian tales mingle with those of the Gypsies, and Finnish tales find themselves in the same series with South American Indian and Indonesian ones. The fact that a volume appears in the series — which now has over eighty titles — is practically a guarantee of its high quality.