

Reviews

Michael PYE, *Zen and modern Japanese religions* [Living Religions Series]. London: Ward Lock Educational, 1973. Paperback. 40 pp. Photographs. Suggestions for further reading. Index. Price: 40p.

If you have ever wanted a "bite-size book" to put into the hands of people looking for a capsule introduction to limited aspects of Japanese religion, this attractive booklet by Michael Pye may solve your problem. In simple language the author weaves together his two main themes, Zen and modern religious movements, into a story at once historical and contemporary.

The book is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1, "The growth of Japanese religions," is a ten-page historical survey that sets the stage for a consideration of the two main themes. Chapter 2, "Zen ideas, Japanese ideas," suggests that while Zen has had great influence on traditional Japanese perceptions and standards in such seemingly disparate areas as swordsmanship, tea ceremony, garden planning, etc., the modern religious movements, having come into existence as alternative approaches to reality, tend toward utopian social views. Chapter 3, "Religious discipline and daily life in Japan," begins by describing the ritual ordering of life in a Zen monastery, and implies that much of the ceremoniousness evident in contemporary Japan is due to religious influence. The modern religious movements, though they too have their rituals, cannot be said to have so extensive an influence on Japanese daily life and are discussed instead under the heading "alternative societies" with emphasis on the activities

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and services in and through which people find help, a sense of belonging, and a goal in life.

One can hardly quarrel with what is said here. The problem is what is left unsaid. In particular I am inclined to think the author has given such emphasis to the psychological and sociological functions of the modern religious movements, a fully warranted emphasis in itself, that he has slighted to some extent the religious foundation and orientation of their activities.

It might also be argued that there is a methodological weakness in the book. The author's procedure is to isolate and describe some Zen phenomenon, point to a similar phenomenon in Japanese culture generally, then suggest without further ado that the latter is due to the former. The inference may well be correct, but until the nature of the relationship between the two sets of phenomena is clarified and criteria of causality proposed, the inference, lacking foundation, hangs suspended in midair.

At this point, however, one must consider the character of the series in which this book appears. The Living Religions Series intends to provide "a clear and factual account of the beliefs and practices of the chief religions of the world" in the hope that it may dispel "much of the ignorance from which racial prejudice stems" and stimulate discussion and inquiry that will further the development of tolerance and mutual understanding. The books in this series, of which this is the eleventh, appear to be addressed to the general reading public, and it is only fair to keep in mind the laudable ethical purpose by which they are informed. The present book does not break any new ground in Japanese religious scholarship, and one should not expect to find in it an introduction to Japanese religion generally, but it is a handy

introductory guide presented in an attractive format and written in a lively style—a worthy contribution to the Living Religions Series.

The address of the publisher is: Ward Lock Educational Limited, Warwick House, 116 Baker St., London, W1M 2BB.

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