

Review: William K. Bunce, *Religions in Japan: Buddhism, Shintoism, Christianity*, Charles E. Tuttle Company, Rutland, VM, 1955 (1976 edn.)

Pages: 194

Land of the Sun Goddess

This manual states the plain facts about Japan's religious history as they may be known, and therefore a large part of all her history. It will succinctly inform of major sects, figures, and beliefs, providing for further study as desired.

The undercurrent across the centuries is conflict between ancestral spirit worship and Buddhism, with Christianity (initially Romanism) a late arrival and persecuted minority. This reflects contemporary Japan which is split between Buddhism and Shinto, with Christianity a disinteresting oddity.

The rise of Buddhism is surprising, given it took a thousand years for it to arrive, which by then even what is doubtful of Buddha's original teachings would have been bastardised, begging the question how the Japanese could know and trust what they were to believe in.

A thousand years of idol and spirit worship, combined with no heritage of the written word has truly made Japan the "missionary's graveyard".

Preface (pp. v-viii)

Religious freedom releases great stores of social energy.

I) Development of Japanese Religions (pp. 1-26)

Japanese history BC is speculative.

In the 1stC AD, Mongols invaded from Korea and settled in the Yamato plain.

Early religion was polytheistic; all was thought to possess spirits which became objects of worship; *kami*.

Introduction of Confucianism from Korea in 405 by Wani spread the tradition of ancestor worship.

Japanese mythology has Izanagi and Izanami descending from heaven to create the Japanese islands and the Sun Goddess Amaterasu Omikami. She sent her grandson to rule, and his great-grandson Jimmu Tenno was the first Yamato ruler.

Traditional Yamato regalia is the sword, mirror, and jewel.

Buddhism arrived in AD 552 but was opposed since disloyalty to Shinto gods could bring bad luck. By 604 however, it had become the state religion.

The Nara period (628-784) was sinophiic; the 646 Taika Reform remodelled government on the Chinese system, and in 655 it was decreed all houses must have a *butsudan* (Buddhist altar).

Since Buddhism (“Buppo”) required education, it was the elites’ religion, the people holding to Shinto.

The *Nihongi* (8thC) and *Kojiki* are official chronicles.

Emperors would often retire to Buddhist monasteries and gain political immunity.

The capitol was moved from Nara to Kyoto in 794.

aicho preached Buddhist and Shinto deities were identical; *ryubo* or “dual aspect”.

In 1185, the capital was changed to Kamakura.

Amidaism held to one thing only – faith in the Buddha Amida. Rebirth in Western paradise was promised to all those who simply called on his name.

Zen Buddhism dates from Nara.

Reformer Nichiren preached the Lotus Sutra doctrine: “Adoration to the sutra of the lotus of the true law”.

The Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281 weakened central authority. The Ashikaga period (1333-1568) were “dark ages” in which Shinto was largely forgotten.

By 1600, Christianity (Catholicism) had arrived and there were 750K converts. Shogun Nobunaga favoured it as a convenient rival to Buddhism, except for the doctrine of the papacy.

During the Tokugawa period (1615-1868), only Buddhism was allowed; everyone had to register which exposed any Christians so they could be killed.

In 1868, the Shogun was forced to resign and abolish feudalism. The Emperor was made sole ruler and with the capitol as Tokyo, beginning the Meiji period

II) Role of Government in Religious Life (pp. 27-43)

The Meiji immediately established Shinto as the state cult and the Department of Shinto. In 1871 it became the Shinto Ministry, then in 1873 a Religions Ministry. Three main principles were:

1. Reverence for national deities.
2. Promulgate “heavenly reason” and “the way of humanity”.
3. Revere the throne and authorities.

In 1877 the Ministry was disbanded, but an Administrative Office survived till 1884. At this time there were 200,000 shrines under state control.

Article 28 of the 1889 constitution permits freedom of religious belief.

The Religious Bodies Law in the 1930s mainly enforced Shintoism. Protestants formed the Church of Christ in Japan, and the Catholic Church was also recognised. The Japan Orthodox Church was denied.

A “national emergency” was declared 1931 with the invasion of Manchuria.

From 1931-41, the war god Hachiman shrines became very popular.

Yasakuni shrine is for deification of war dead.

III) Buddhism: Origin and Nature (pp. 44-48)

Sakyamuni Gautama (566-486 BC) preached 45 years, dying at age 80.

Buddhism only reached Japan after a millennium, meaning it had already changed.

IV) Buddhism: Institutional Aspects (pp. 49-57)

Primitive Buddhism had four orders: monks, nuns, devout laymen, and devout laywomen.

Japanese monks were black, bishops purple, and dark red for archbishops.

The Buddha Hall is the main sanctuary, housing a stupa memorial dome and pinnacle symbolising Buddha's bones.

Japanese Buddhism is Chinese Mahayanism.

There are no services; priests chant sutras and offer prayers daily, tinkle bells and burn incense.

V) Buddhism: Description of Sects (pp. 58-97)

Japanese Buddhism has 43M across six main sects:

-Nara: *Hosso* claims: all empirical existences are nothing but ever-changing “store-consciousness”; self-consciousness causes all human delusions; and one attains Buddhahood by eliminating self-consciousness.

Kogon believes: in a “cosmic soul”; that the ego is only the relation between self and others and that recognising this leads to communion with Buddha.

-Tendai: only meditation can lead to the supreme truth; the whole cosmos is present in the tiniest particle; life of the universal self should be lived. Followers worship both Buddha and Myojin, guardian god of temples.

Shugen claims Buddha Dainichi is the god of the universe.

Shinsei says invoking Amida assures rebirth in the “pure land”. The common worship object is his statue.

-Shingon (“magic formula”): founder Kukai had himself buried alive in a meditation posture in 835. The universe is the body of cosmic Buddha Dainichi and there is a pantheon of deities and demons. There are also mystical finger signs and magical spells.

A ten-step spiritual ladder exists:

1. Mind focused on food and sex.
2. Recognition of morals and social convention.
3. Childlike innocence.
4. Awareness of self-existence and [paradoxical] self non-entity.
5. Partial self-consciousness eradication.
6. Illusory nature of external existence [denial of Realism].
7. Enlightenment as reality.
8. The “way of reality”.

9. Free movement in a living-force world.
10. True enlightenment.

Kukai popularised the use of the *mandala*.

-Amida: the most powerful sect. Amida was a Bodhisattva who after countless ages established the “pure land” (*Jodo*) in which he preaches the “law of Buddha” to the saints.

The phrase: “adoration to the lord of boundless light and infinite life” must be repeated often.

Good deeds are irrelevant since salvation is assured by faith alone.

-Zen: this aims to directly transmit Buddha’s mind to the disciple. It is an intuitive method without scriptures. Bodhidharma brought Zen from India to China; in 520 he sat staring at a blank wall for nine years.

Chinese monks brought a Confucian philosophy Shushi which developed into *bushido*.

-Nichiren: he attacked Amidaism as depriving Sakyamuni of his true glory.

VI) Shinto: Nature and Types (pp. 98-114)

There are no official Shinto scriptures.

It has no concept of guilt or sin; only ceremonial purification in presence of deities is required.

A *torii* stands at every shrine entrance, the symbolic gateway dividing sacred from secular.

Tennoism is the belief the emperor (*tenno*) is the living incarnation of Amaterasu.

VII) Shinto: Shrine (pp. 115-128)

Shrines symbolise man’s relation to the spiritual world, nature, and the

universe.

Hachiman (“eight-banners”) was conflated with the Buddhist Eightfold Path and is chief patron of the soldier.

Worship objects are god-bodies (*shintai*).

VIII) Shinto: Sectarian (pp. 129-147)

Jotei is the Confucian god.

Mountain worship aboriginal.

Pious Shintoists erect small shrines on mountain peaks.

Kurozumi Munetada (1780-1850) received sacred commission from Amaterasu in 1814 while praying to the rising sun to preach universal brotherhood.

Tenri-kyo is the most active sect: the universe is reasonable and ultimate reality is divine reason; man must cast out all evils (“dust”); reincarnation exists; and Tenri-o-no-mikoto is the god of divine reason.

IX) Christianity (pp. 148-159)

Jesuit Francis Xavier arrived 1549, but left in 1552.

After Japan was closed, there was an uprising in Amakusa island, October 1637 of persecuted Christians: 30,000 were killed (the Shimabara massacre).

The first Protestant church was established in Yokohama, 1872.

Christian education is negatively impacted by bias against private schools and restrictions on religious instruction during class.

X) New Sects (pp. 160-165)

The average client has 280 sessions!

People tend to distort their interpretation of past events.

XI) Impact of Occupation on Japanese Religions (pp. 166-185)

The Shinto Directive condemns: “The doctrine that the emperor of Japan is superior to the heads of other states because of ancestry, descent, or special origin.”

Hotoke is Buddha and *Jigoku* “Living Buddha”.