

Brian McVeigh, *The History of Japanese Psychology: Global Perspectives, 1875–1950*

London: Bloomsbury, 2016. 336 pages. Hardcover, \$120.00. ISBN: 9781474283083.

In the 1870s and 1880s, the Japanese endeavored to understand and translate a barrage of basic Western concepts that they were encountering for the first time. Among these were “religion,” “consciousness,” “liberty,” “society,” “idea,” “perception,” and “rights” (as in human rights). A pioneering scholar in the endeavor to understand Western philosophical concepts was Nishi Amane, who in 1875 translated a book by Joseph Haven titled *Mental Philosophy: Including Intellect, Sensibilities, and Will* (published 1857). To abbreviate “mental philosophy” (*shirijō no tetsugaku*), Amane coined the term *shinrigaku*, which literally means the study of the principles of the heart-mind (*kokoro*). The word *shinrigaku* would be adopted as the translation for the new academic discipline of “psychology,” which by the early 1900s was moving away from philosophy in Japan and becoming an experimental science.

Brian McVeigh, in the book under review here, suggests that the development of psychology in Japan illustrates a shift from an “introcosmic” to an “introsopic” worldview. At the beginning of the nineteenth century an introcosmic view dominated. It was conceptualized partially in Neo-Confucian terms, in which the cosmos, the social order, and human nature were intertwined. More attention was given to morality than to a person’s interiority. Self-knowledge was sought through understanding the way of heaven. Vitalistic forces filled the world. At the end of the nineteenth century, an introsopic view rose to prominence, at least among intellectuals. Those with such a

view valued the discovery of mechanical laws in nature and denounced beliefs in erratic supernatural forces as irrational.

Psychology in Japan was both a product of and proponent for this shift in worldview. Inoue Enryō (1858–1919), famous for his studies of monsters (*yōkai*) and for trying to eradicate “superstitions,” was a leading scholar among those interested in psychology. Inoue wrote several books on psychology and had interest in the relationship between Buddhism and psychology. McVeigh tells us that Inoue “was the first specialist in *shinrigaku* to become a professor at Tokyo Imperial University” (51). Yet, he is not regarded among the founding fathers of psychology in Japan because his “psychology” was more philosophical than empirical.

The two scholars most important for establishing experimental psychology in Japan were Mōra Yūjirō (1858–1912), who studied at Johns Hopkins with G. S. Hall, and Matsumoto Matatarō (1865–1943), who studied at Yale with Edward Wheeler Scripture and then at Leipzig with Wilhelm Wundt. In 1903, they established at Tokyo Imperial University the first psychology laboratory in Japan. Although psychology was still housed in the department of philosophy at the time, the establishment of that laboratory and another one in 1906 by Matsumoto at Kyoto Imperial University helped push the development of psychology beyond philosophy to become a distinctive discipline with its own experimental methods.

The first six chapters of the book, which show how psychology’s history in Japan relates to fundamental changes in ways of understanding human nature and behavior, are of particular interest for ethnologists. Those chapters show, inter alia, how psychology played a role in modernity and in creating a secular, science-based world in Japan that called into doubt common beliefs in spiritual entities and powers.

Chapters 7 and 8 are concerned with the expansion of psychology in academia, applied psychology, different areas of specialization, and psychotherapy. Chapter 9 indicates how psychology related to the nationalist state goals from the 1920s to 1945. Chapter 10, a brief final chapter before an epilogue, argues that after World War II Japan became a “psychologized society” that put more emphasis on the self and the therapeutic than before.

Overall, the book is encyclopedic in the amount of data it offers. Although it lacks sustained historical narratives, it provides more than enough information to make a valuable reference work. There are over twenty “snapshots” that provide relevant historical information in textboxes, mostly on important historical persons. There are also over twenty-five tables interspersed throughout the book. They include information on: key works (e.g., translations of section and chapter titles of books, titles of graduate theses), the different experiments by Mōra, types of abnormal psychological phenomena, and topics of radio lectures, among other things. Toward the end of the book, there are ten appendixes, which are mostly lists of such things as major works on psychology in Japanese, the founding years of psychological laboratories in different countries, Japanese academic journals on psychology, academic associations, Japanese translations of basic English terms in psychology, and key persons in the history of Japanese psychology. The book’s greatest contribution, however, is its showing in detail how psychology’s development was part of Japan’s modernization, which involved an engagement with and a response to domestic and international conditions.

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