

selected pictures, but also for the learned and thoughtful manner in which the entire book is written. As would be expected in a work of this quality, there is a comprehensive bibliography and an index of persons and subjects. The price of the book, DM 98.00, might seem a bit expensive, but for a comprehensive work like *Narrenidee und Fastnachtsbrauch* I find it quite reasonable.

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JAPAN

NEFSKY, MARILYN F. *Stone Houses and Iron Bridges: Tradition and the Place of Women in Contemporary Japan*. Toronto Studies in Religion. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 1992. xviii+260 pages. Tables, bibliography, index. Hardcover SFr 69.50; ISBN 0-8204-1568-5; ISSN 8756-7385.

This book concerns women, religion, and change in Japan during and after World War II. It differs from other books on the subject in that it does not merely describe how the position of Japanese women has changed but also attempts to explain the disparity between their present legal status and the reality of their social experience, which lags so far behind.

The author, a historical-sociologist of religion, aspires to present a model that will comprise "a tool to better understand Japanese society" (xvii) and thus help the reader to a deeper understanding of his or her own society as well. The author's methodological approach is eclectic, employing sociohistorical as well as empirical analyses. Her explanation centers upon the religiocultural tradition without neglecting the impact of other factors such as the social and political systems. She contrasts the postwar era with the period of the so-called Fifteen Year War (from the 1931 Manchurian Incident to the end of World War II in 1945), because, she says, "it is the Fifteen Year War that most clearly illustrates the power of the religious cultural beliefs, values and norms, their intensity of expression, and their ultimate impact on the Japanese people" (3). Nefsky chooses as her "ideal type" of Japanese woman the postwar urban middle-class woman, since she finds that this type represents the normative standard for women in Japanese society.

To present Nefsky's conclusion first: it is the religiocultural tradition—the basic value system—that has hindered legal changes from taking full effect in Japan and that explains why Japanese women still are confined to the traditional role of the "good wife and wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母). In the first chapter she clarifies fundamental concepts such as the relation between tradition and modernity, which she sees not as a dichotomy but as a convergence of old and new values and a coexistence of change and continuity. Nefsky's concept of religion is a broad one, since it includes not only religious institutions and dogmas but also general beliefs, values, and norms. She thus sees religion as a dimension that can be found in any society, "however differentiated its social structure" (11).

Nefsky considers the role of religion during the Fifteen Year War to have been the promotion of a "sense of sacredness of being Japanese" (33) founded upon Shinto, a unifying principle in the broadest sense. She shows how this belief was utilized on the

different levels of family, ideology, and media to guarantee the stability of state power and the effectiveness of war politics. She sees in this wartime system a patriarchal system par excellence with counterparts in other societies, yet "unique in that the underlying beliefs and values . . . are rooted in the Japanese religiocultural tradition" (61). To explain this she has to go back to prewar times, sometimes even to the Tokugawa era: her description of the educational system refers to the Meiji era, and her discussion of "women and labor" to the Fifteen Year War (unfortunately she is not always clear what period she is dealing with—her description of the divorce system, for example, mixes Tokugawa and Meiji practices [67]). Nefsky's section on religion comprises a general analysis of Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism as they relate to women.

Her description of the postwar period deals with the effect of Occupation policy on education and religion. The privatization of religion under the Occupation did not bring about a general secularization, as is so often claimed. Japanese religiosity is traditionally diffuse and vague: "When the Japanese deny religious affiliation, it is not religious consciousness or religious faith but membership in religious organizations they are rejecting" (Ishida Takeshi, 117). The religiosity of the Japanese lives in their veneration of their ancestors, in their visits to temples and shrines, in their participation in the religious festivals that have been revived since the 1970s, and in the spectacular development of the New Religions. The majority of the New Religions' adherents are women, a fact that can be attributed in part to demographic changes. Low birthrates and the increase in life expectancy often confront women in their middle years with existential problems that they try to overcome by joining religious groups. Even when the founder of a New Religion is a woman, however, it is men that later come to dominate the organization and stress traditional norms of submissiveness and obedience. In sum, Nefsky concludes, Occupation politics had little effect on religious beliefs and customs.

She finds the same to be true of the education system, which, far from educating women for professional careers, trains a compliant workforce. Yet more and more women are participating in higher education, choosing to keep their jobs even after marriage, and even aspiring to full careers. The recent Equal Employment Opportunity Law has brought about some changes in working conditions for women, although the pre-ratification discussions revealed many of the old prejudices against working women on the part of employers. The same conservative attitude can be found among political leaders, who, Nefsky says, still pursue national security and stability at the expense of Westernization. The difference is that their methods are no longer military but economic. They still profess "a sense of sacred community" to which women are sacrificed to the role of "good wife and wise mother." This is no longer an indocinated ideology but a reinterpretation of old values to fit the economic needs of the present.

Though still greatly underrepresented in national politics, women are active at the regional level in citizen's and consumer groups, where on a broader level they realize what it is to be a "good wife and wise mother." Their satisfaction with this role is underscored, according to the author, by "the optimistic tradition" of Shinto that "rejoices in birth and life" (219), a world-affirming view that has always been stronger than Buddhism and Confucianism. The prominent participation of the Japanese woman in festivals and rites of passage throughout the year attests to her "faith in the value of life and the part she plays in it" (221).

Interestingly enough, Shinto's this-worldly orientation is seen as the cultural basis for Japan's economic progress by quite a number of other Western authors. In this

respect Nefsky is in line with present theories on the cultural background of modernization, although she focuses on the regressive rather than the progressive elements. Her book deals with essential issues confronting Japanese women today, but her approach can be criticized for its over-generality, such as its total neglect of the differences between urban and rural Japan. The strong point of the book is that it stimulates the discussion on Japanese women in the context of cultural and religious traditions. The question is whether the same arguments regarding the influence of the Shintoistic world view do not apply equally to Japanese men, many of whom are rejoicing in a life that is mostly work. Whose consciousness then is more traditional, the women's or the men's?

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ROTERMUND, HARTMUT O. *Hōsōgami ou la petite vérole aisément. Matériaux pour l'étude des épidémies dans le Japon des XVIIIe, XIXe siècles* [*Hōsōgami* or smallpox contracted easily]. École Pratique des Hautes Études, Centre d'Études sur les Religions et Traditions Populaires du Japon. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1991. 306 pages. Plates, bibliography, index. Paper FFr. 218.00; ISBN 2-7068-1033-5. (In French)

This book is a good example of why a knowledge of popular religious phenomena is becoming indispensable to both the history of ideas and to what has been called "l'histoire des mentalités."

The study examines smallpox epidemics and the folk-religious reactions to them, focusing upon the second half of the Edo period. The introduction explains—though without the clarity one might have wished for—the necessity of showing, first, how the concept of smallpox fit within the larger epistemological framework, and second, how folk traditions "familiarized" themselves with smallpox (and to a lesser extent measles) and came to see the disease as the result of an external, demonic intervention that people could then manipulate and transform. The book is not a historical analysis of epidemics in Japan *à la* Le Roy Ladurie, nor is it a geography of disease or a history of Japanese medicine. It is concerned solely with how disease was conceived of and how, on the basis of that conception, it was placated through a host of magico-therapeutic practices. The author uses two types of Edo-period sources: medical documents and "folk" materials (including paintings, dances, songs, popular short stories, and poems).

Smallpox and measles ravaged Eurasia for centuries until they were controlled by vaccination during the middle of the eighteenth century in Europe and shortly thereafter in Japan. Japanese epidemics of these diseases, first mentioned in eighth-century sources, were in all probability the result of contacts with China and Korea. They continued more or less regularly until the final epidemic in 1862, causing much suffering and death. They also gave rise to a number of palliative "medical" measures (as varied as they were interesting and ineffective) and excited many reactions within the realm of symbolic behavior. A large part of Rotermund's book attempts to establish the relation between these two orders of reaction as seen in the *Dandokuron* 断毒論 [Treatise on eliminating poisons], a text published in 1810 by the Edo-period doctor HASHIMOTO Hakuju. Hashimoto, bemused by the folk practices he witnessed and sometimes recorded, proposed a new concept of the diseases and their treatment.