

*Shin Buddhism is known in Japan
as Jōdo Shinshū, or*

“The True Pure Land Religion.”

*Today, Shin is one of the most important schools
of Buddhism in Japan*

new members in an age when the New Religions entice many Japanese from the traditional religious beliefs.

Popular Buddhism in Japan is very accessible to the reader due to the many illustrations, photographs, excerpts, and interviews. For many teachers, this book gives a well-rounded introduction to a religious sect often ignored in the West. The chapters are concise, and they avoid any over-interpretation of Buddhist thought. In fact, the opposite is true; a greater emphasis is placed on Shin in the context of culture and the modern age.

This book would make a wonderful addition to a university course on Japanese religions, and indeed, to almost any course dealing with Buddhism or Japanese history. The short texts found throughout the book would be ideal for a high school world history or Asian studies course. The author provides a brief introduction to each text, enough to place the reading in context for the student. Best of all, the bibliography is very extensive and allows the reader to pursue a further examination of Shin Buddhism. ■

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A Lateral View

Essays on Culture and Style in Contemporary Japan

By Donald Richie

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA: STONE BRIDGE PRESS, 1992
245 PAGES

Most English-speaking travelers to Japan have probably encountered Donald Richie's writings. Some of his other books include *Taste of Japan*, *The Japanese Tattoo*, *Japanese Cinema*, *Japanese Film*, *Films of Akira Kurosawa*, *Introducing Japan*, *Introducing Tokyo*, *The Temples of Kyōto*, *Geisha*, *Gangster*, *Neighbor and Nun*, and *Public People, Private People*. A past film curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Richie has lived in Japan for forty-five years. As someone who lives in two cultures, Richie's awareness of both cultures makes him a penetrating observer of Japanese life.

This compact (about 5 by 7 inches) book contains a collection of twenty-eight essays written between 1962 and 1989, mostly in the 1980s. The essays appeared in diverse and difficult-to-find places including the *Japan Society Newsletter*, *Japan Times*, *Japan Foundation Newsletter*, *Travel and Leisure* and *East-West Film Journal*, among others. The collection is divided into six sections representing broad themes, Japanese rhythms and shapes, Tokyo, language and signs, dramatic arts, cinema, and contemporary popular culture.

I put this book on my shelf next to works on contemporary culture: *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture* by Martinez;



RECORDS OF WIND AND EARTH: A TRANSLATION OF FUDOKI, WITH INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARIES

by Michiko Y. Aoki

In A.D. 713, the Japanese central government ordered all provincial governors to compile surveys of their respective regions, including products, animals, plants, land conditions, etymologies of place names, legends, and oral traditions. The five extant "old" *fudoki* translated in *Records of Wind and Earth* are all that remain of these early reports. Three of these *fudoki* (Harima, Bungo, and Hizen) are being made available here for the first time in English. This collection

contains invaluable records for any English-speaking person wishing to understand the early history of Japan—its land, its people, and its earliest literature.

Monograph 55. ISBN 0-924304-32-4. 1997. 364 pages, cloth. List price: \$36 (AAS Members) \$29.00

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BOOK REVIEWS

ReMade in Japan by Tobin; *Japan: Why It Works, Why It Doesn't* by Mak, Sunder, Abe and Igawa; Joy Hendry's books *Understanding Japanese Society*, *Interpreting Japanese Society*, *Wrapping Culture*; and Nancy Hume's *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture*. It overlaps with each, although Richie's essays are less academic.

I cannot comment on all twenty-eight essays, but I will mention five of my favorites to provide a flavor of them. "Japanese Rhythms" (1984) describes the use of time. Japan uses a mix of "modern" and "traditional" time with a lot of time devoted to maintaining social relations. Time is less "wasted" than "invested" into maintaining relations and distinctions of status. It is not a moral concept as it often is in the United States.

In "Tokyo, the Impermanent Capital" (1979) Richie describes Tokyo's urban environment as different from other cities, and even when it looks like some other cities externally, it operates differently. The city lacks central planning and is more a large collection of semi-independent areas. The city also reflects the cultural idea that physical structures are independent, impermanent and subject to constant renewal.

In "A Vocabulary of Taste" (1983) he introduces several Japanese aesthetic terms for which there is no direct English translation, and which Richie believes would improve American sensitivity. This aspect of Japanese culture illustrates how a culture can recognize many artistic distinctions and sensitivities, even when its urban physical environment and daily work routines appear to be dull and mundane. One example is the attitude *mono no aware*. Richie notes that it has had a place in Japanese culture at least since the *Tale of Genji*. Its meaning, "sensitivity to things" or "things which move one," tempered with an acceptance of the transience of life, is rich and captures a dimension of the Japanese outlook.

Richie gives us a history of Japanese reactions to the Western practice of kissing and the growing adoption of the practice in Japan in "The Japanese Kiss" (1983). He also discusses the restricted meaning of kissing in contemporary Japan. This is useful not only in illustrating the Japanese response to Western cultural practices, but in sensitizing students to the assumption that cultural practices found in their own culture are "natural."

"Pachinko" (1980/1986) describes this popular form of recreation. Richie discusses what attracts the Japanese to Pachinko and its meaning for them. Playing it has a numbing effect, and there is great emphasis on finding a machine that feels right. He says it is a distraction, but its true aim is "The annihilation of self, a most pleasant state" (p. 233). He suggests Pachinko should be seen as more akin to an unusual type of Zen meditation than a frenzied Las Vegas-style pursuit of monetary gain.

I would not assign this book to my undergraduates, although it would make a valuable library addition. I would consider assigning a few essays from it. The essays are short and easy to read, as their initial appearance in an English-language newspaper, travel magazines and newsletters suggests. As with any collection of essays written over a long period, they vary in relevance and perceptiveness.

There are three difficulties for classroom use. First, enough of the essays are dated or dependent on first-hand experience that their utility as a window into contemporary Japanese daily life and culture is limited. Second, the topics covered are eclectic. This is

not necessarily a problem, except important aspects of Japanese culture are omitted. The film essays are outstanding, but anyone not familiar with Japanese cinema of 20+ years ago will have difficulty appreciating them. Third, the essays are uneven. Some are worth re-reading for their insights, others are only worth several minutes of entertainment in a daily newspaper.

In sum, even if it does not make a good assigned text, this book is worth having in the library and reading for selected essays. You may find one or two that work as a short, insightful entrée into Japanese culture for your students. ■

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The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture

By Mark Schilling

NEW YORK: WEATHERHILL, 1997

343 PAGES

PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS



In this superb book Mark Schilling has gone a step beyond the usual academic rigmarole and has presented a text that should not only be *required* reading for all Japan scholars and students, but one that is also such an interesting journey into the mysteries of contemporary Japan that its readers may find it very difficult to put down.

Tirelessly researched, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture* (henceforth "J-Pop")

serves as an introductory primer to the side of Japan that most Westerners are oblivious to—the wild side. Through his minute examinations of everything from the 1970s pop music sensation Pink Lady to