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Popular Buddhism in Japan: Shin Buddhist Religion and Culture. By Esben Andreasen. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998, 199 pages, ISBN: 0-8248-2027-4 (cloth, US\$39.00), ISBN: 0-8248-2028-2 (paperback, US\$22.95).

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The teaching of *Jōdoshinshū* (or Shin Buddhism) in the American undergraduate curriculum has been hampered from the outset by a lack of variety in available teaching materials. One can readily find materials by and about Shinran Shōnin (1173-1263), the founder of the school, and increasingly one may obtain materials by and about Rennyo (1415-1499), the “second founder.” Anything beyond that has been exceedingly rare and generally not useful or convenient for classrōm use.

Esben Andreasen, a Danish high school teacher who has long studied Japanese Buddhism and collaborated on projects with Ian Reader, has corrected this deficiency with a remarkable compilation of source materials on Shin Buddhism designed expressly to expose students to a wide variety of texts from the Shin tradition. *Popular Buddhism in Japan: Shin Buddhist Religion and Culture* contains a few writings by Shinran and Rennyo, but more importantly, it contains a total of fifty-one texts arranged thematically into chapters on Shin Buddhist education, the *Dōbokai* movement, arts and aesthetics, rituals, death and funerary practices, writings by significant modern figures such as Kiyozawa Manshi and D. T. Suzuki, and the transmission of Shin Buddhism to the West.

The selections encompass pictorial selections as well as texts. Among the former, one may find illustrations from Kakunyo’s *Godenshō* with explanatory notes (pp. 19-25). These reproductions from Shinran’s biography, though sadly printed very small, provide a valuable window into the way in which Japanese believers visualize the life of the saint. Other illustrations include further examples of traditional Shin art and photographs taken by the compiler during trips in Japan.

The texts give a balanced view of Shin Buddhism from both insiders’ and outsiders’ perspectives. While many of the texts are reprints from other works, several others are original to this book, notably Mr. Andreasen’s interviews with prominent Shin leaders, priests, and educators. These selections provide the reader with an oral history of Shin Buddhism and the challenges it faces in the modern world. Also included are Mr. Andreasen’s own field notes, taken during observations of major public festivals such as the *ho-onko* and the *Higashi Honganji*, and funeral observances for private families.

Many of these selections put a new spin on some of the received knowledge of Japanese Buddhism in the western academy. For example, the chapter on Shin aesthetics (two words which I myself have never seen together) contains an essay on the meaning of the tea ceremony from a Shin, rather than a Zen, perspective. In addition, one may be surprised by the attitudes displayed by Shin Buddhist leaders in some of the interviews: they clearly consider Shin Buddhism as very modern and anti-superstitious, and thus

eminently suited to meet the spiritual needs of a technological society.

This book exhibits a few notable flaws as well. By far the weakest part is the author's short essay on the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which is full of oversimplifications and factual errors. The chart on page 6, for example, which shows the branching of Buddhism into different schools, puts the origin of Chan Buddhism in India, and shows both Madhyamika and Huayan Buddhism as dead ends that never went outside of China, ignoring the transmission of Sanron and Kegon Buddhism to Japan during the Heian period. On page 7 the author claims that the name Amitābha means both "infinite life" and "infinite light," when in fact it means only the latter, the former being a translation of the Buddha's other name, Amitāyus. The short extract from the Larger *Sukhāvati-vyūha-sūtra* on the same page shows a definite Shin Buddhist bias, translating the Chinese *shī nian* as "saying my name ten times," which ignores the double meaning of the word *nian* as either "recite, say" or "contemplate." I would not recommend having students read this chapter.

Another weak point is that the compiler seems not to have a working knowledge of Japanese. Because of this, the selections chosen for inclusion came of necessity from texts already available in English, or (in the case of his own interviews), from figures who speak English or occasions when he could engage a translator. While the range of selections as it stands looks much better than anything available to date, one wonders how representative it really is, and how it might have been different had the compiler been able to survey a broader sample of materials in Japanese.

Other difficulties are more technical in nature, and reflect some laxity in the editorial process. There are enough misspellings throughout the book to be distracting, and the romanization of Chinese terms oscillates between Wade-Giles and pinyin, sometimes on the same page, as in the chart mentioned above and on page 128, which mentions the "*Kuan Wu-Liang-Shou-Ching-Shu* by Shandao." As a potentially popular textbook, this work is likely to remain in print for many years, and it would be appropriate for the University of Hawai'i Press to correct these errors before the next printing. These problems aside, Mr. Andreasen has presented a tremendous gift to the community of teachers and students of Japanese religion: a truly comprehensive anthology of materials illuminating Shin Buddhism from many angles and providing its English-speaking audience with a multifaceted picture of this tradition, the spiritual wealth it possesses, and the challenges it faces in the modern world. I highly recommend it for the specialist's bookshelf, and for use by undergraduate and graduate students.