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Practical Pursuits: Religion, Politics, and Personal  
Cultivation in Nineteenth-Century Japan

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that their losses, too, might have been the result of a causal chain originating in the past. This circumstance is perhaps the most powerful sign of both the interiorization of Buddhism that had occurred in premodern Japan and its limitations.

Each of these books in its own way helps to illuminate the ways in which religious ideas and practices concur in shaping people's understanding of the meaning of life and death—and the actual extent and function of such understanding. From them we glimpse the variety of visions of death and the afterlife produced by Japanese over the centuries, and we see that not all individuals may have assimilated these visions equally; at the same time, we are left wondering about the actual impact of religious ideas and practices on the subjectivity and interiority of individuals during crucial moments of life.

*Practical Pursuits: Religion, Politics, and Personal Cultivation in Nineteenth-Century Japan.* By Janine Tasca Sawada. University of Hawai'i Press, 2004. 387 pages. Hardcover \$45.00.

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Following up on her *Confucian Values and Popular Zen: Sekimon Shingaku in Eighteenth-Century Japan* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), in her new book, *Practical Pursuits: Religion, Politics, and Personal Cultivation in Nineteenth-Century Japan*, Janine Tasca Sawada offers a meticulous foray into the minds of late-Tokugawa and early-Meiji thinkers across various religious and intellectual traditions and from different levels of society. One of the necessary limits of the study is geographic: the network of thinkers that Sawada examines centers in the western Kantō region (Edo/Tokyo and Kanagawa), a region whose nineteenth-century religious infrastructure has also been studied by Helen Hardacre in her recent *Religion and Society in Nineteenth-Century Japan: A Study of the Southern Kantō Region, Using Late Edo and Early Meiji Gazetteers* (University of Michigan, Center for Japanese Studies, 2002). Like Hardacre, Sawada does not confine her study to one tradition; however, her focus is not merely geographic, but also thematic. Her decision to trace a particular theme through an era of Tokugawa intellectual history is, of course, not completely unprecedented. In his *Tokugawa Ideology* (Princeton University Press, 1985), for example, Herman Ooms noted the intersection between Neo-Confucian, Shinto, Buddhist, and folk eclecticism in the early Tokugawa period. To do this plurality justice while still maintaining narrative cohesion, Ooms, too, adopted the approach of focusing on a particular theme that can be followed across multiple traditions.

In this case, Sawada has chosen the theme of personal cultivation. She does not confine herself to thinkers of the highest level of political influence but also includes somewhat unlikely candidates: Neo-Confucian intellectuals who questioned academic textual discourse in favor of practicality, diviner/physiognomists, the founders of Misogikyō and Renmonkyō, and the Rinzai Zen abbots of Engakuji (Kamakura) and their lay followers. Her study yields fascinating insights into the religious and intellectual currents of this seminal period of Japanese history, including the theories of

Mizuno Nanboku (1760?–1834?), one of the founders of Japanese physiognomy and macrobiotics; the environment from which emerged the early transmitters of Zen Buddhism to the West Shaku Sōen (1860–1919) and D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966); and the troubled relationship between the modern Japanese news media and Renmonkyō, emblematic of the way new religious movements are often portrayed to this day.

Part 1 covers the late Tokugawa period from the 1830s to the 1860s. In chapter 1, Sawada situates her topic of self-cultivation within the contexts of Neo-Confucianism and Zen Buddhism, two interlinked sources of sophisticated self-improvement programs. She discusses how representatives of these traditions, similarly to scholars of national learning, criticized more textually oriented Confucian scholarship for being esoteric and obscure. Some Confucian scholars, she explains, rejected self-contained textual analysis as abstract and empty, instead embracing practical learning (*jitsugaku*) and self-cultivation. Others adopted a form of textual eclecticism, developing a method of study that searched for the midpoint between various opposing schools (*setchūgaku*). Such views were shared even by thinkers outside strictly Neo-Confucian circles, such as the Zen monk Imakita Kōsen (1816–1892), the focus of chapters 5 to 7, and preachers of Shingaku, a movement that eventually became strongly influenced by Zen Buddhism under Takahashi Kōsetsu (1819–1876).

Chapter 2 singles out two diviners, Yokoyama Marumitsu (1780–1854) and Mizuno Nanboku. Marumitsu's divination system relied on predictions based on the dates of conception and physiognomy to deduce a person's fortune and moral capacity so as to allow followers to cultivate their endowments, minimize their defects, and gain health and prosperity. Mizuno Nanboku's method relied on the interpretation of a person's physiognomy and potential for self-improvement through dietary restrictions. Because of its large following, Marumitsu's Tōkyūjutsu movement aroused the suspicions of the Tokugawa authorities, but he tried to allay the accusation of heterodoxy by stressing Tōkyūjutsu's focus on healing and familial harmony. While in 1848 Marumitsu was prohibited from spreading his teachings, he received no further punishment, and his movement was able to survive underground despite losses of membership.

In chapter 3 Sawada takes up Inoue Masakane (1790–1849), the founder of the Tohokami movement later known as Misogikyō. As Sawada points out, there are a number of similarities between Masakane and Kurozumi Munetada (1780–1850), the founder of Kurozumikyō. Masakane's background was highly eclectic, combining Pure Land Buddhist, Shirakawa Shinto, Confucian teachings, Chinese medicine, and divination. As priest of the Umeda Shinmei shrine in Musashi, Masakane engaged in healing and social activism through which he was able to attract the financial support of the upper echelon of peasant society. His methods combined purification rites (i.e., repeated chanting of a purification formula rather than reciting formalized prayers) with breathing techniques to foster gratitude and faith in Amaterasu and break through delusion. His activities led to persecution by the authorities in the early 1840s and his eventual exile to Miyakejima, where he spent the rest of his days.

Part 2 of Sawada's book begins with chapter 4, which traces the shifting parameters of learning, education, and religion in the 1870s and 1880s as practicality gained increasing significance. Sawada's clear contextualization of the development of the concept of religion (*shūkyō*) is one of the most lucid in the field. Chapters 5 to 7 delineate early Meiji changes in monastic education and the growing lay involvement in

Rinzai Buddhism under Imakita Kōsen, the abbot of Engakuji (Kamakura) and teacher of Shaku Sōen. While my own personal interest in popular religion in the Tokugawa period led me to prefer the first third of the book, readers with a particular interest in Meiji-period Rinzai Zen will find Sawada's careful analysis in chapters 5 to 7 seminal to understanding the origins of the emerging lay movement that eventually brought forth thinkers such as D. T. Suzuki. Sawada's scholarship provides a noteworthy addition to studies by Robert Sharf and Bernard Faure and the volume edited by James Heisig and John Maraldo on the connections between sociopolitical conservatism, nationalism, Zen Buddhism, and the Kyoto School. By and large unaffected by the separation of Shinto and Buddhism immediately after the Restoration, Engakuji, like other large Rinzai temples, felt the impact of other changes such as the abolition of the temple registration system (which bore on the ways in which temples could raise revenue), loss of temple lands, severe decreases in the monastic population and decline in its morale in the aftermath of the introduction of clerical marriage, and the ideological shifts resulting from the Great Promulgation Campaign. Leaders such as Imakita responded by advocating a return to earlier ideals and establishing monastic educational facilities.

In chapters 6 and 7, Sawada argues that, in response to losses of revenue, Engakuji expanded its reliance on educated lay patrons, both male (*koji*) and female (*zenshi*). These were not only called upon for their financial support, but also encouraged to engage in practices previously open only to the clergy, such as meditation retreats and the study of koan literature. Even though Imakita did not seek to popularize Zen practice among lay people at large, select lay followers with intellectual potential, including members of the Shingaku, Tohokami, and Tōkyūjutsu movements, were encouraged to practice Zen-style self-cultivation. Imakita's efforts met with some resistance among the monastic community, who did not want to share their space and resources with lay people.

Part 3 of Sawada's book traces the development of self-cultivation programs across Sect Shinto groups and Rinzai Zen during the 1880s and 1890s. Chapter 8 discusses how various groups such as Tohokami, Tōkyūjutsu, and Shingaku were successfully incorporated under the umbrella of Hirayama Seisai's Taiseikyō, a Sect Shinto group that grew out of the Great Promulgation Campaign and embraced a pliable combination of Confucian teachings, Western science, and Japanese learning. As Sawada notes, Hirayama's emphasis on personal introspection and sincerity was perhaps too abstract for the more practically minded followers of the earlier self-improvement movements, but other methods, such as breathing and meditation techniques as well as theories of mental disposition and original nature, resonated with the cultivation programs developed by these groups. Taiseikyō gave these movements legitimacy in the eyes of the authorities and provided a loose framework of incorporation that allowed the groups to maintain their own programs and objectives despite their official affiliation. Chapter 9 extends the discussion of the connections between various religious and intellectual groups to the Rinzai Zen community at Engakuji, which saw a conservative backlash against the introduction of what members perceived as demoralizing Western values and teachings. Shingaku's Kawajiri Hōkin, who was also a lay practitioner at Engakuji, argued passionately for the preservation of patriarchal authority and against the introduction of legislation that would give men and women equal rights—despite admitting that by nature the two sexes were equal.

Chapter 10, however, shows that not all religious movements fit seamlessly into the intellectual mold of the period. An example is Renmonkyō, founded by Shimamura Mitsu (1831–1904), which gained followers in Tokyo, central Japan, and northern Kyushu as people desperately sought for relief from recurring cholera epidemics, but was ultimately unable to shake off public criticism. A fierce media campaign spearheaded by the popular *Yorozu chōhō* newspaper criticized the group’s “superstitious” healing practices and religious syncretism combining Nichiren-derived Buddhism and a nominal Shinto affiliation, and accused the group of financial corruption and moral depravity. In the end, these allegations drove Renmonkyō into extinction despite its affiliation with Taiseikyō. According to Sawada, Renmonkyō did not share the general consensus regarding self-cultivation that linked Tohokami, Tōkyūjutsu, Shingaku, and lay Zen practitioners and that enabled these groups to deflect earlier suspicions of heterodoxy. This last chapter on Renmonkyō may not fit as smoothly into the narrative progression of the book as the others, but it will allay criticism that Sawada presents only the concerns of intellectuals with a common interest in self-cultivation and does not take sufficient note of heterodox devotionalist movements that did not share the same ideals.

Given the enormous scope of Sawada’s study, the book holds together exceptionally well. Her densely packed manuscript contains enough material for two books with less diachronic breadth. It would have been possible to expand on the sheer physicality of the Edo-period movements and treat the developments within Rinzai Zen separately. Yet Sawada’s decision not to study these various groups in isolation allows ultimately for greater understanding of their resonances and institutional connections. As Sawada points out, the focus on practicality and personal improvement that developed out of Tokugawa Neo-Confucian regimens and Rinzai Zen continued to appeal to upper and middle levels of Japanese society well into the twentieth century.

*Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity.* By Tomiko Yoda. Duke University Press, 2004. 280 pages. Soft-cover \$23.95.

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In this work, Tomiko Yoda proposes to do two things: the first is to critique the construction of the discipline of *kokubungaku* (national literature), showing its necessary complicity with the formation of the modern Japanese nation-state and the constitution of a modern subjectivity for that state’s citizens; the second is to offer her reading of *Kagerō nikki*, and the kind of feminine “estranged voice” she discovers there, as a step toward resolving what she sees as an impasse reached by feminist theorists in their considerations of feminine identity and agency. As this summary suggests, Yoda’s book is a combination of literary history and literary criticism; that is, some chapters are devoted to the emergence of *kokubungaku* discourse, while others present the author’s own readings and interpretations of such primary texts as *Genji monogatari* and *Kagerō nikki*.

In her introduction, Yoda makes clear that she is going to contrast “traditional