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**Review:** Whether there is, or was, a "New Age" culture in Japan is not entirely clear, since those elements which characterise such a phase of "spirituality" in the western world were available in any case in Japan before the movement captured with this designation got going in the sixties and seventies elsewhere. The main focus of this work, however, is the productions of five writers who have been characterised as "spiritual intellectuals" and it is certainly helpful to have their ideas presented in a systematic and reflected manner, as is done here. The five writers in question are Umehara Takeshi, Nakazawa Shin'ichi, Yamaori Tetsuo, Kamata Toji and Yuasa Yasuo, all of whom have commented extensively on "religion" and proposed, with variations, that Japanese religion, being integrative and mysterious, is generally superior to western religion which is dualistic and destructive of the environment. Thus they fall, it would seem, into the overall tradition of Nihonjinron, namely the idea that Japanese culture is distinctive, even unique, and should be rediscovered from its roots upwards for the benefit of the rest of humanity. It must be said however, that that to which they in fact have recourse is, according to this presentation, nothing other than a series of features of existing Japanese religions. Of course there is interpretation involved, as when supposedly archaic elements of Shintô are brought forward in a manner which is somehow independent of its ideological use in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as in much contemporary Shintô apologetics, or when aspects of esoteric Buddhism are brought into play, yet again, as in various new religions such as Agonkyo and Aum Shinrikyo. Since the thoughts of these writers relate freely to the religious traditions of Japan, which also continue to exist as institutions, it is questionable whether there is really a parallel here to the at least partially institution-less "New Age" culture of the western world.

A particular difficulty arises in so far as the author seeks to locate the writings of these persons within the general context of Religionswissenschaft. The prononents of this discipline in Japan, quite naturally, as elsewhere, have shared in the wider intellectual interests of their times, and some plausible connections are made in this respect. However, in spite of a certain spiritualising or psychologising tendency among some Japanese specialists in the study of religions it would not seem to this reviewer correct to designate the writers presented here as "Religionswissenschaftler", as is done, unexpectedly, on page 50. For one thing, they do not regard themselves as such. For

another thing, they are all operating with a more or less religious programme rather than with the intention of understanding, analysing, and explaining the phenomena of religion. The problem may lie in the view of Religionswissenschaft and its history which is taken here. Supposedly, the state of affairs in Japanese studies of religion has never really been presented before. However this reviewer himself published a detailed statistical and longitudinal analysis of the membership of the Nihon Shokyoshi Gakkai (Japanese Association for the Study of the History of Religions), taking special account of the relationship or distance between religious orientation and academic affiliation (*Religion, Journal of Religion and Religions* Special Issue on the Occasion of the XIIIth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, August 1975, pp.55-72), and in various other publications has pointed out the significance of serious reflection on religions prior to the nineteenth century, which is completely disregarded here. Some writings by former Tokyo University professor Tamaru Noriyoshi are referred to, but then why not also his study of fifty years' history of that same organisation (*Shukyogaku no rekishi to kadai*, Tokyo 1987)? Even if we consider only the later history of the study of religions in Japan, as is done by the authors who are drawn upon in this book and who share the usual misconception about its having arisen only in dependence on the work of Max Müller and other nineteenth century pandits, there has nevertheless been a definite trend in Japan, as in the western world, towards an increasing independence of the study of religions (Religionswissenschaft) from religious programmes and viewpoints. After all, the much quoted Shimazono Susumu, University of Tokyo, is not one of the five authors studied. If anything, he studies them. Shimazono is the Religionswissenschaftler, the five authors studied are the object of study.

In spite of such problems of perspective, this work provides an interesting introduction into a range of writing which is extremely relevant to the understanding of the recent and present religious situation in Japan. The importance of such writers should not be underestimated. Japan is a heavily literate society and in spite of the new media, the amount of time spent in commuter trains continues to place demands on the publishers' flow of stimulating and imaginative literature to wile away the time. Moreover, to take just one example from among the authors studied, Umehara Takeshi is the director of the Nichibunken, an academic research institute providing an international window for Japanese cultural studies. Thus, overall, there is a significant ideological weight here, accompanying Japan's economic and financial clout. Many readers will be grateful for this induction into the ways in which not a few Japanese "intellectuals" (*chishikijin*) mobilise and market religious or "spiritual" themes.

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