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Review: Buddhism, Unitarianism, and the Meiji Competition for Universality by Michel Mohr

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is one flaw to this book, it is the way it leaps from Edo to the contemporary period in its study of covert Shin Buddhism. Much more needs to be learned about what happened to these groups in the Meiji and Taisho periods, for example, when religions outside the mainstream also had to dissemble and conceal to escape state persecution. Shin groups like Urahōmon used a strategy that other religions also took to survive. New religious movements like Oomoto-kyō, for example, affiliated with state-approved sects that could provide them with cover to disseminate their own controversial beliefs and practices. One also wonders how Kirishimakō as a Shintō-affiliated movement fared in the prewar period against the state-sponsored *tennō* cult and its heavy-handed shrine and temple policies. Did Kirishimakō experience pressure from the new state ideologies that had so little in common with it? Nonetheless, this excellent book needs to be read by everyone interested in Japanese religions.

Buddhism, Unitarianism, and the Meiji Competition for Universality. By Michel Mohr. Harvard University Asia Center, Cambridge, Mass., 2014. xxii, 324 pages. \$39.95.

Reviewed by
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The Meiji period found Japanese intellectuals considering the role of religion in modernity. They reflected not only on Buddhism and Shintoism, but on Western imports also. Among those imports was Unitarianism, which appealed greatly to the Buddhists because it distanced itself from the theological strictures of other Christian sects. The Buddhists saw Unitarianism as a system that would not impose demands of allegiance to God and one tightly tied to rationalism, reason, and science. This appealed to the Buddhists as well as to Meiji enlightenment scholars, such as Fukuzawa Yukichi. Thus, the Unitarian mission quickly gained favor in the 1880s when scholars began considering whether there could be a universal unity, one that transcended religious sects. However, this favor was lost a few decades later as Japanese moved strongly toward State Shintō as part of a focus on a national faith.

Michel Mohr's monograph focuses on the rise and fall of Unitarianism in Japan. The title of this volume contains three large areas of discourse—Buddhism, Unitarianism, and Universality—all of which are philosophical in nature. The work itself, however, is not so much a philosophical study as it is a political history of Unitarianism in Meiji Japan with some related material about Buddhists who were attracted to the concept of "unity." With

this work, Mohr has added to a very small corpus—no more than a few articles—in English on this topic by examining unpublished letters in the archives of the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, mostly by Americans involved in the Unitarian movement at the turn of the century. Thus, this book fills a small but significant niche. There are more resources on the Unitarian movement in Japanese, most notably more than half a dozen articles by Tsuchiya Hiromasa on Unitarianism, and in particular its relation to Fukuzawa Yukichi.

The book is divided by the author into three parts: the first part covers the arrival of Unitarianism in Japan and how it bloomed at first only to fade a few decades later. The second part is organized in a *jimbetsu* form, that is, it focuses on the same time frame as part 1 in separate chapters that recount the experiences of certain people. Chapter 4 features Furukawa Rōsen and Murakami Senshō, both Buddhist intellectuals who were influenced by Unitarian ideas. Chapter 5 features Kishimoto Nobuta (another Buddhist intellectual), and chapter 6 features Abe Isoo and connections between the labor movement and Unitarianism. The third part is also organized as a *jimbetsu*: chapter 7 features John B. W. Day, a Unitarian missionary, chapter 8 focuses on Saji Jitsunen (president of the Unitarians in Japan 1900–1909) and Hiroi Tatsutarō (a former professor and assistant to Saji), and chapter 9 focuses on the Zen teacher Kōgaku Sōen. An epilogue ties up some of the loose ends. At first I found this organization slightly confusing, but once I conceived of it as a *jimbetsu* it was easier to follow. Mohr provides a useful overall timeline at the beginning of part 1 which helps the reader keep the chronology straight.

If the reader approached this book looking for a doctrinal examination of Unitarianism in the Buddhist context, she would be disappointed. Mohr gives fair warning of this in his introduction:

The methodology guiding the present study is largely sociohistorical, for we need a better understanding of how particular ideas develop at specific junctures in specific contexts. . . . It does not imply a naïve attempt on my part to create a “metadiscourse” about universality but simply my willingness to see to what extent historical figures embedded in particular religious and intellectual settings were able to see beyond their own horizons. (p. 10)

Most early chapters certainly do this: they are largely an accounting of correspondence between various Japanese and Americans about the Unitarian presence in Japan. Sometimes the correspondence is grave and accusatory, and sometimes it is petty. Little of it is about what “universality” is; rather, it is about things such as whether the Unitarian Church in the United States would continue to financially support missionary efforts in Japan (chapter 2) and the dissatisfaction of Unitarian Association Director Clay MacCauley

at being left off the masthead of the publication *Yunitarian* (p. 24), or the need in MacCauley's eyes for a physical building for Unitarian activities in Tokyo (pp. 27–37).

Besides the study of these letters, Mohr forays into a handful of related topics, including the “quiet sitting method” (*seizahō*) of Okada Torajirō. This, and also the chapter on the labor movement and Murakami Senshō and the chapter on Sōen, could stand alone as a journal article and indeed perhaps would be better in that context because the connection to Unitarianism is sometimes unclear. Mohr, primarily a scholar of Zen, is very much in his element writing about Sōen, and it shows. There is much more in the Sōen chapter about specific philosophical concepts than in other chapters. The final part of the book tells us of the split between Japanese and American Unitarians, thus the end of the American mission. The last pages of the epilogue examine the concept of universality from both Unitarian and Buddhist perspectives. I found this simultaneously fascinating and frustrating: fascinating because it answered a number of questions that had come to me as I read the book, and frustrating in that I wished this section had been placed at the beginning of the book instead of the end. One could see it as an exercise in delayed gratification, or one could simply read the epilogue first, and then dive into the introduction.

The writing sounds very much like a dissertation: first we are told how the author became interested in the topic, what resources he used, what other material has been published, etc. The subsection titled “Approach and Methodology” would not be out of place in a dissertation but seems awkward in a monograph.

There is not a major thesis holding this book together, but Mohr writes as if there were. We are repeatedly told that something “needs” to be addressed or is “necessary,” presumably to support an argument. For example: “A note of caution about my treatment of Japanese Unitarianism is necessary” (p. 11); “We need to further examine how this all came about” (p. 69); “before examining the repercussions of [Kishimoto's] stay at Harvard, we need to look at his background” (p. 87); “A word of explanation is in order before proceeding further” (p. 153). In most of these passages, the “need” is stated at the end of a section and then not addressed in the following section. The implication is that there is a meta-narrative, one that requires various supports, but Mohr does not clearly delineate it.

There are other infelicities, which I will mention briefly. First, the book is meticulously footnoted, sometimes overly so. For example, Mohr tells us that “Furukawa was born on the third day of the sixth lunar month of Meiji 4, corresponding to July 20, 1871” (p. 65, note 5). The diction is often circuitous, for example, “It does not seem presumptuous to contend that no in-depth study of Unitarianism in Japan has appeared in English” (p. 7) and “It is in 1983 that Kiyooka Eiichi published his [work]” (p. 8). Sometimes

this causes confusion, as in the phrase “The third book-length study of 2004” (p. 9), which implies that there were three studies produced in 2004, when Mohr elsewhere makes it clear there was only one. Mix this sort of problem with typographical errors, and we occasionally find sentences like this: “Giving the popularity of Yūaikai, when the divorce between the two organizations was consumed and became public, it was perceived as a further sign of the inability of foreigners to understand the Japanese situation” (p. 167). Finally, the index has occasional errors, such as the omission of a page range where there should be one: for instance, Anesaki Masaharu appears on pages 98–99, not just page 98. This last problem is certainly minor, and overall the layout of the text is well done. A final quibble: Harvard still separates out Japanese text from English, requiring the author to compile a separate *kanji* glossary for all Japanese names and terms. This seems odd, because there is a mix of romanization and *kanji* in the bibliography, so it would seem possible to do the same in the body of the book.

Minor complaints aside, Mohr has documented the rise and fall of Unitarianism in Japan well. He shows that, more than doctrinal issues, political issues were largely to blame for the split between Japanese Unitarians and American Unitarians. And, although not addressed directly in the book, it would also seem that there were linguistic issues; the Japanese who most closely befriended the Americans and became involved in the Unitarian movement were fluent English speakers. One wonders if history would have unfolded differently had the Americans become fluent in Japanese. Mohr has also shown how Buddhists of the age viewed the concept of “unity” and whether the Unitarian interpretation of it was compatible with a Japan that had rapidly become a world player.

The Life and Afterlives of Hanabusa Itchō, Artist-Rebel of Edo. By Miriam Wattles. Brill, Leiden, 2013. xii, 288 pages. €103.00.

Reviewed by

JAMES T. ULAK

Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

Hanabusa Itchō (1652–1724) flourished in the liminal spaces of Edo. As a poet, painter, song writer, and entertainment impresario, he plied the trades of word and image. In spite of its elaborate hierarchies, the new urban culture allowed for places, often in the entertainment quarters but also within the evolving circles of avant-garde poetry, where a kind of sanctioned mixing of the classes could happen. While not a complete leave-your-social-identity-at-the-door environment, these occasions tolerated considerably