

BOOK REVIEWS

Christopher Benfey, *The Great Wave: Gilded Age Misfits, Japanese Eccentrics and the Opening of Old Japan*. New York: Random House, 2003. xviii + 334 pp. ISBN: 0-375-50327-7.

Reviewed by Daniel A. Metraux

Christopher Benfry, a professor at Mount Holyoke College, presents a fascinating account of the encounter between Japanese and American intellectuals throughout the Meiji period (1868-1912). Benfry introduces us to some of the leading cultural figures of that day including Herman Melville, Kakuzo Okakura, Isabella Gardner, John Manjiro, Henry Adams, John La Farge, Lafcadio Hearn, and Theodore Roosevelt by presenting carefully detailed portraits of their influence on both cultures.

Benfry argues that when the United States entered the “Gilded Age” after the Civil War, there was a “tremendous vogue” for all things Japanese, including an intense interest in art, culture, and religion. No region of the United States was more enamored with Japan than New England. This affinity is hardly surprising since New England had sent merchant and whaling ships into Asian waters – past Java and Japan, and on to Shanghai and Calcutta – since the late 18th century.

Boston’s intellectual elite from the mid-19th and early 20th century had an intense interest in Asian philosophy and religion. Emerson and Thoreau had looked to Hinduism and Buddhism for sustenance as early as the 1840s and in subsequent decades a growing number of the city’s thinkers and writers, “deeply disaffected by the vulgarity and superficiality of American culture” in the decades following the Civil War, turned to Buddhism and voyages to Asia to find what some of them considered to be superior civilizations or traditions.

Many of these aristocratic New Englanders, according to Benfry,

Discerned in the traditions of Old Japan, an alternative social order of hereditary aristocracy, austere religion, and aesthetic cultivation. In the self-sacrifice of the samurai, they detected the stern ethos of their own Puritan forebears. (Were they not themselves, amid the corrupt governance of the Gilded Age, leaderless *ronin* in search of a cause worth fighting for?) In the martial arts of judo and archery,

they discovered something like that soldiery virtue lost in an age of soft prosperity – the “Gilded Age” of American millionaires. And in Zen austerity and reserve, they found confirmation of their own recoil from Victorian excess and ostentation. In old Japan, in short, they thought they glimpsed a Golden Age, a world they were eager to visit before it disappeared (p. xiv).

The irony, of course, is just as the Bostonians were falling in love with Old Japan, Japan was reinventing itself as a modern state. In a quarter of a century Japan evolved from a feudal backwater to an international power. Yet while Japan was modernizing itself, Henry Adams and artist John La Farge traveled across the country collecting art, studying Japanese and Asian religious themes, and visited an endless array of temples. Lafcadio Hearn studied traditional Japanese folklore and Buddhism and introduced both of these to the West in his exceptionally popular books. Edward Sylvester Morse became the world’s leading expert on Japanese marine life and architecture, his publications on the topic strongly influenced later architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright. Astronomer Percival Lowell wrote books on Japanese culture and religion while spending ten years in the East.

Isabella Gardner and Ernest Fenollosa came to Japan as collectors and students of Japanese art and returned with large collections that today grace the Gardner Museum and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Then we are introduced to Dr. William Sturgis Bigelow, who lived in Japan for many years studying the country’s art, religion, and martial arts. He later returned to Boston to run the Japanese art collection at the Museum of Fine Arts and introduced his close friend, Theodore Roosevelt, to *jujitsu*.

The President became an ardent practitioner of the sport and greatly admired many aspects of Japanese culture. We also get an in-depth view of *The Book of Tea* by Kakuzo Okakura, which remains an excellent seller. We follow Okakura as he traveled with Fenollosa across Japan collecting religious and other art objects, and observe how he later played a critical role in building the Buddha room in the Gardner Museum and also building the outstanding Buddhist collection in the Museum of Fine Arts just across the street.

Other scholars have written articles and monographs about the experiences of some of these individuals in Japan a century or more ago. What makes this book so rewarding is how Professor Benfey integrates these people as a group and shows how their activities and encounters

influenced each other. Fenollosa, Gardner, Okakura, La Farge, and Adams knew each other, but it is only here that we can see how their work on Japan was affected by their interactions. Even more fascinating is our introduction to lesser-known figures such as Mabel Loomis Todd, the first woman to climb Mt. Fuji and one of the first Western figures to express an interest in Ainu culture and religion, and Fenollosa's young beautiful wife Mary, who strongly influenced Hearn with her interpretations of Japanese Buddhism.

Professor Benfey's meticulously researched and elegantly written study provides a very clear depiction of two nations that became fascinated with each other as they both came of age in the midst of the imperialist era. This sense of fascination, though marked by periods of great anger and violence, continues today. The student of Japanese history and religion, however, will have a much clearer view of how this sense of wonder grew by reading *The Great Wave*.

Gail Dubrow with Donna Graves, *Sento at Sixth and Main: Preserving Landmarks of Japanese American Heritage*. Seattle: The Seattle Arts Commission, 2002. 220 pp. ISBN: 0-295-98245-4.

Reviewed by Masaki Mori

With regard to historical issues that concern Japanese Americans, the experience of relocation and internment during World War II invariably looms, followed by either the Issei adjustment to hard life in a new land or by the social, generational conflict in which the Nisei found themselves. Writings on groups of Japanese ancestry, fictional or non-fictional, tend to address all of these three issues in an interrelated way with varying emphasis. It is, however, not easy to find a research project that provides a vivid yet balanced perspective that reveals ordinary aspects of these people's lives. This book of ten chapters, of which Dubrow wrote eight and Graves contributed the remaining two, offers such a perspective with an abundance of period photos accompanied by apt explanations.

Supported and published by the Seattle Arts Commission, *Sento at Sixth and Main*, results from a sense of urgency about the rapidly disappearing architectural traces of Japanese American heritage. The documentation covers many aspects of daily life of the first two generations, starting with hard laborers of the early Issei immigrants, who formed thriving communities, and due to forced evacuation, saw their

demise, concluding with the pastime of bowling generally preferred by the Nisei after World War II. The ultimate goal is to have each site's social and cultural significance in the nation's migration history recognized publicly and registered officially as such on local, state, and federal levels. In some cases, county or state authorities have already designated the sites as historical landmarks, thereby providing them with needed protection, and the authors advocate acknowledgement at a higher governmental level. Many other buildings, however, have been neglected to the ravage of time, either simply forgotten, waiting to be unearthed archeologically, or subjected to intentional demolition such as arson and urban restructuring. In these cases, a call for deserved recognition and preservation is obviously more pressing. Covering a century of footsteps by the Japanese Americans on the West Coast, the ten chapters are arranged in chronological order with each chapter devoted to a select focal point in time and space.

The first chapter delineates the Japanese camp at Selleck in the state of Washington, which was one of the locations of a thriving lumber industry in the Northwest, secluded from regular human habitation, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Parallel to railway construction in those days, heavy labor coupled with coarse living conditions in the mill was rarely chosen by anybody but hardworking Japanese migrant workers. Although unacknowledged, they made essential contributions to the rapid development of the coastal states that needed a large, constant supply of building material.

The next two chapters document the lives of the workers, as well as newer immigrants, after leaving hard labor in the wilderness during the century's early decades. Chapter 2 illustrates agricultural production in which most Japanese migrant workers were originally engaged, for example, the Neely Mansion in Auburn, Washington. Although the ethnicity of its residents changed a few times, the farmhouse is now represented as the first Caucasian settlement, not reflecting its multicultural past. Chapter 3 shows Natsuhara's store in the same town, which supplied sought-after groceries and other merchandise to an increasing number of Japanese households scattered around the state. Destroyed by arson shortly after the owner's death in 1999, the store demonstrates the need to protect surviving Japanese American landmarks.

The middle three chapters follow the next immigration trend to urban life in Seattle, when communities in cities and towns were prospering prior to World War II. At the same time, the focus of interest shifts from the hardships that the Issei encountered to a gap of expectations between

them and their American-born children, on whose collective memory this book heavily depended to reconstruct the past. Chapter 4 deals with the Nippon Kan Hall in which various cultural activities took place. Chapter 5 recounts the Hashidate-Yu, one of the public baths, and Chapter 6, the Kokugo Gakko infusing Japanese identity into Nisei children. When open hostility of many guises limited the immigrants' range of social engagement, these establishments served as important meeting points to enhance a sense of communal cohesiveness. This was the case with Japanese language schools, to be attended daily after regular schooling, against which many Nisei hold an enduring grudge. In contrast, the children familiarized themselves with the bathing culture of Japan with great joy. The interior of the public baths remain relatively intact to this day, and everyone shares in its fond memory. The Sixth and Main bathhouse thus stood "at the heart of Seattle's Nihonmachi [Japantown]," physically and metaphorically (p. 84). The book is titled after this location for its symbolic value, and the chapter's placement at the center of the book might not be a mere editorial coincidence.

The next three chapters deal with the vicissitude of Japanese communities in California during the critical war period, respectively centering on activities around the Enmanji Buddhist Temple in Sebastopol, the Kuwabara Hospital, a nearby midwifery in San Jose, and Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. Chapter 9 briefly mentions the evacuation in a few pages. Given the grave consequences of wartime experience for Japanese Americans, this light treatment is almost alarming at first. With the book's principal aim at preserving the rapidly disappearing landmarks of the group's heritage, however, it is understandable that the authors placed little weight on camp sites, many of which have already gained substantial recognition and have been well documented. And after all, living in camps meant unusual circumstances away from regular life, to say the least. The last chapter sheds light upon the Holiday Bowl that functioned as the sporting hub of Nisei social life in Los Angeles when the established community was on the decline as a result of internment and the general exodus of its residents to suburbia.

The text's objective narration is interspersed with emotionally-fraught recollection of individuals' past experiences. A few notable examples include: the death of a three-year-old girl due to the hazardous location that the Natsuhara family had to accept in their limited choice of residence; the taste of an ice cold soda pop that brought children to near ecstasy after a very hot bath in the *senjo*; and the familial, relaxing

atmosphere of the bowling alleys in the midst of racial exclusion by the sport's national league. Such succinctly-cited personal accounts render each site inseparable from people's lives, thereby making it more palpable to the reader.

The book project deserves a larger font size. The small print might incline a potential reader to forego reading through it after a quick look at a few pages. A larger format would also be desirable to view photographic details of the many images included. Undoubtedly, the final production does not reflect the authors' best intentions. Some people might also feel a slight uneasiness about topical inconsistency when, after the first six chapters, the focus abruptly shifts from Washington to California without any explicit rationale being given. This was inevitable, however, considering the fact that the Japanese American population, along with its architectural vestiges of the past century, is spread all over the West Coast. Overall, the book is effectively designed to achieve its main goal of bringing the plight of the group's architectural heritage to public attention for urgent action, and the project is praiseworthy for this reason alone. At the same time, the work will be instrumental for preserving the rapidly fading memory of the lives of immigrants and their families as they actually lived in the last century.

Anne Walthall, ed. *The Human Tradition in Modern Japan*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2002. 241 pp. ISBN: 0-8420-2912-5.

Reviewed by Tinaz Pavri

This volume, edited by Anne Walthall, is a welcome addition to the ever-burgeoning arena of Japanese studies. A collection of biographical sketches, primarily by historians (and an anthropologist), the book seeks to fill what it correctly perceives to be a void in the field. While there is greater and greater interest evinced by students and the general public in Japan, many of the portraits of Japanese life that are available tend to be caricatures rather than true reflections of people and their life in modern Japan. In offering the reader an in-depth look into the lives of Japanese people from different spheres of life and eras, the authors want to present the "true" Japan on its own terms through the stories of ordinary Japanese people, rather than offering yet another academic analysis of the seemingly interminable question of what the essence of "being Japanese" really is.

The book is divided into five sections, starting with the Tokugawa era and moving on to the Meiji Restoration, the late 19th century period of modernization, and the pre-war and post-war twentieth century. According to Walthall, the encompassing time frame was chosen to underline and to help examine the importance of these centuries for an understanding of modern Japan. Each section comprises the “stories” from that era – of men and women from all walks of life, from diverse professions and of varied qualifications. For instance, the section set aside for the Tokugawa shogunate includes a chapter on Shinanomiya, daughter of Emperor Gomizunoo (1596-1680), and shows her little-known position in the court of the Emperor as an exalted female as well as the inherent contradictions of gender and class. Our expectations of rigid restrictions on her movement and a strictly-circumscribed lifestyle are pleasantly belied by the reality of her accounts of juggling multiple duties as a wife, mother, and daughter.

In the section that spans the early twentieth century, there is a startling chapter on the feminist writer Yoshiya Nobuko, who was one of the first notable Japanese women to live openly with her female partner. Letters penned between the two offered a glimpse into the difficulties faced by educated Japanese women of that time who rejected the norm of a “good wife, wise mother” role, and as in Nobuko’s case, boldly chose a most unusual path. This chapter in particular also affords the reader a context of discrimination and hostility based on sexual orientation that is easily generalized to other countries and regions. Japanese laws at that time that prevented women living together in the same house echo similar laws, which have effectively discriminated against same-sex couples in other countries.

Indeed, one of the volume’s greatest strengths is this element of surprise that confronts the reader and breaks down previously held conventional notions of life in modern Japan. Here are the stories that are not often told about people who are not featured in the panoply of existing writings on Japanese society. Even when highlighting the biography of a more “conventional” woman, one who lived willingly within the parameters of the dictate of a “good wife, wise mother” role, we are still struck by the strong personal ambition and aspirations of such an “ordinary” woman. While accepting many of the prevailing norms of late nineteenth century patriarchal Japanese society, Hatoyama Haruko still devoted her life to raising the educational level of Japanese women and was able to attain many successes.

The volume is careful to include a focus on the lives of both men

and women along with the ordinary and the unique. Walthall mentions that there was an attempt to balance the number of chapters on men and women without imposing artificial numerical quotas on how many could be included. This is successfully accomplished. Other chapters in the volume examine the life and work of Jahana Noburu, a scholar and minority activist from Okinawa; Matsuura Isami, the patriarch of a rural family; and the early-twentieth century Marxist economist, Takahashi Masao.

Overall, the *Human Tradition in Modern Japan* is an interesting and eye-opening collection of individual stories that highlights social, economic, cultural, and political transformations focusing on different time periods. For the reader, it affords a rich context with which to study and understand Japanese society, politics, and history. One drawback, however, is that the volume lacks any kind of theoretical framework, instead presenting each of the chapters as stand-alone stories. In the case of other chapters, this format ends up delivering a journalistic, or informative, account of the individual's life accomplishments or trials. A theoretical framework that informed and infused the different chapters in the book might have mitigated this problem to an extent.

This having been said, however, the book enriches the literature on modern Japan and will go a long way in providing readers with a richer and more intimate knowledge of the country and people that they are studying. Finally, focusing mainly on the ordinary (and extraordinary) lives of people, the reader acquires a much more realistic picture of the country than is gained from those books that would primarily examine the rich, famous, or politically powerful. This perhaps, is the volume's greatest strength: the simple and unadorned look at those people and events that ordinarily might be sidelined in our study of Japan, but which when highlighted, afford a deeper and more intimate understanding of the country.

James Arraj, *Christianity in the Crucible of East-West Dialogue: A Critical Look at Catholic Participation and God, Zen, and the Intuition of Being*. Chiloquin: Inner Growth Books, 2001. 345 pp. ISBN: 0-914073-03-6.

Reviewed by James W. Heisig

This volume contains two books: the first, a new work, and the second, a reprint with minor corrections of a work that was first printed in 1988. I will focus my remarks chiefly on the former.

To begin with, let it be said that this is the first book-length attempt I know of to question whether the content of Buddhist enlightenment and the Christian experience of divine grace can be compared or understood in terms of each other. The author's assumption from the outset – an assumption, let it be said, based on other works of his that I have not read – is that they cannot, and claims to the contrary are a betrayal of faith. If anything, his efforts to argue the case have persuaded me more than ever that the question needs to be taken more seriously by Christian theologians.

That said, I am not sure that his proposal of “a theological conversation in which theology looks at the vital issue of its relationship to faith, and the need of Catholic theology to actually scrutinize what can be said, and what would be in opposition to Christian faith” is the right place to begin (p. 101). Certainly, a self-reflective and rational tradition like Christian theology needs to draw borders and set limits. But at a time when the fact of religious pluralism has stepped beyond the confines of doctrinal differences to generate interest in pluralistic spiritualities *across* traditions and *within* individual believers, the context of the question cannot revolve around the single, unmovable center of truth-claims, as these books attempt to do.

The views that Arraj argues against are all set up as variations on the assumption that Christianity can be understood in terms of Zen. (The chapters on Hinduism and Islam are by and large incidental to his case, and the fact that the writings of Raimon Panikkar and Wilfred Cantwell Smith do not figure at all, suggest that this is new territory for the author). These views are skimmed from the surface of a broad spectrum of contemporary thought. Practitioners of Zen are painted into a corner of having to clarify their stand on doctrinal questions that are generally of secondary concern to them. Synopses of essays and books by theologians of religion are laid out in tandem to give the impression of a conspiracy to reinterpret the central tenets of Christian faith in Buddhist categories.

When Arraj writes of things that I am familiar with, his account strikes me as out of focus. When he summarizes works I have not read, I find myself doubting his presentation. The only exception is his account of Jacques Maritain's thought in the second book, which I found a refreshing and even a nostalgic reminder of a sadly neglected thinker. The one book Arraj does lock horns with at some length is Joseph O'Leary's *Questioning Back*. Unfortunately, he does not seem conversant with the mainstreams of twentieth-century philosophical and theological thought and ends up a poor match for the savvy O'Leary, who bears on the hellenization of dogma and

the Western metaphysical tradition. Later on, Arraj tips his hand in more telling terms:

Can we, for example, take various forms of post-modern philosophers stemming from Heidegger or Wittgenstein or Whitehead and create new theologies out of them? We can certainly make use of the insights they provide, but there will come a point when we need to make a judgment of whether these...are compatible with the faith (p. 160).

His idea that first there is faith, and this faith in turn “creates its own philosophical context,” begs the question that O’Leary wants to question (p. 161). I would add that by erasing Whitehead from the picture, he misses some of the most creative theological work done on Buddhist-Christian encounter and falls on his own sword with the later complaint that “for the most part Catholic participants in East-West dialogue find it difficult to imagine that Christian metaphysics really has anything to say” (p. 200).

Remarks on the relationship between the Christian mystical tradition and Zen are scattered throughout, but always made subservient to the same dichotomies: Zen is a “natural mysticism” and focuses on the Self; Christianity is supernatural and focuses on the relation with God. The wall between them can be torn down only by the classical Christian strategy of seeing the former as a preliminary step whose fulfillment lies in the experience of the personal God. Skipping lightly over Eckhart, whom he half-heartedly acknowledges as a possible exception, he calls Van Ruusbroec to his support. Curiously, he relies on the account of Paul Mommaers in *Mysticism Buddhist and Christian* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), while completely passing over the intervening chapters of Buddhist commentary by the co-author, Jan Van Bragt (whose name is misspelled).

The author admits in principle that there may be something for Christianity to learn from Buddhist thought and spirituality: “From a Christian perspective, there is no need to either deny the authenticity and great beauty of enlightenment, or to try to transform Christian contemplation into another experience of it” (p. 51). But whatever we have to learn, it will not be up to the rational standards of Christian thought, since Buddhism lacks a “philosophical position in the classical Western sense of the term” and is concerned only with liberation and enlightenment (p. 211). The caricature is unacceptable, and the reader wonders how Arraj could have read the material he summarizes and still sustain it. He repeats again

and again a certain sympathy towards critics of Christian churches and their failure to face questions from the wider world of religion and contemporary thought, as if to parry the criticism that he is no more than a dyed-in-the-wool conservative, disappointed that the philosophy he knows best has been passed over. But in the end his resistance to learn anything new and concrete from Buddhist thought gives a certain hollowness to his criticisms. Arraj's suggestion that Buddhist emptiness is the virtual equivalent to the no-thing of Aquinas and Maritain, or the *nada* of John of the Cross, and that the idea of no-self can be translated without significant remainder into a neo-scholastic notion of the "affective ego," are both indications of his conviction that there is nothing really important in Buddhism that is not already in Christian tradition.

The second book purports to present a Thomistic appreciation of the nature of Zen enlightenment (including the use of Maritain's thought to generate Christian "kōans"). I have been away from scholastic thought too long to comment on Arraj's interpretations, but I am uneasy about seeing Maritain's "intuition of being" and the shift from "essences" to "existence" at the core of Aquinas' thought. I would have thought that at least the counter-positions of thinkers like Bernard Lonergan, Frederick Copleston, David Tracy, and David Burrell deserved some mentioning. All of them are deeply familiar with scholastic and neo-scholastic thought and all have something quite different to say on the subject of dialogue with other religions and philosophies, but their voices are silent. At the same time, although I find it hard to agree with Arraj's position or methods of argument, I do not mean to exclude the possibility that other currents from medieval thought might shed light on the questions he is raising. Bonaventure's description of spiritual ascent and Ramon Llull's art come immediately to mind.

I repeat: the question Arraj asks is an important one. I am just not sure that his way of posing it and his animus towards alternative answers serves any other audience than those that have already decided on safeguarding the Christian faith against the onslaught of an interreligious world. Readers interested in a scholarly and more positive approach would do well to pick up *Purity of Heart and Contemplation: A Monastic Dialogue between Christian and Asian Traditions* (New York: Continuum, 2001), edited by Bruno Bernhart and Joseph Wong. In its pages Christian monastics speak of their assimilation of Eastern spirituality and methods of meditation into their own contemplative practice. It would be enlightening to hear how people like them would handle the question.