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Stephen Grover Covell. *Japanese Temple Buddhism: Worldliness in a Religion of Renunciation.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005. 256 pp. $25.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8248-2967-4.

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Japanese Temple Buddhism, Stephen Covell's felicitous choice of terms to describe what frequently is dubbed in literature about Japanese religions as "established Buddhism" (*kisei Bukky?*) or "traditional Buddhism" (*dent? Bukky?*), has been struggling for the better part of the last 150 years, if not longer. As Covell makes clear in his book, which focuses on contemporary Temple Buddhism, the Buddhist clergy of these denominations find themselves hammered by variety of forces that include pressures from their parishioners (*danka*), demands of their sectarian leaders for reforms of various types, and the contradictions inherent in being almost universally house-holding clerics in denominations that continue to idealize world renunciation and monastic practice. Additionally, the clergy of Temple Buddhism receive steady criticism from the popular media and face stiff competition for members from a host of new religious organizations. Finally, like most organizations in Japan today, the clergy must contend with a rapidly aging and ever-shrinking population, which only serves to exacerbate the overall sense of crisis among clerics. In what will no doubt be a landmark volume in the fields of Buddhist studies and Japanese religious studies, Covell examines with great sensitivity the manner in which the clerics of Temple Buddhism, particularly those in the Tendai denomination, attempt to preserve their practice and way of life in the face of growing indifference, if not hostility, in Japanese society today.

There has been a need for a book like Covell's for a long time in both Buddhist studies and Japanese religious studies, as several factors have worked together to limit scholarship that examines contemporary Temple Buddhism in depth. As Robert Sharf noted in his essay on the Zen-derived, quasi-new religious group Sanb? Ky?dan, anthropologists have expended much of their energy on Japanese new religions, while scholars of Buddhism, until very recently, have concentrated their own efforts on Japanese Buddhism from the time of its importation to Japan until the start of the Edo period, deeming later developments someone else's?"historians, sociologists, anthropologists?"business. In addition, there has been a general sense that Buddhism, apart from the New Religions, is moribund, corrupt, and largely irrele-

vant in modern Japan. As a result, scholars of the tradition need not take post-World War II Buddhism seriously. Anyone who has taught a course that covers post-war Japanese religions will be aware of this lacuna in the literature, for, apart from a handful of essays, several of which belong to Covell himself, there has been almost no critical scholarship of contemporary Temple Buddhism available in English or, even more surprisingly, in Japanese.

The publication of Covell's book, which is a pioneering examination of multiple facets of contemporary Temple Buddhism, is a welcome change from this situation. The book includes a wide-ranging analysis of such important topics as the recruitment and training of new clergy, temple management, family life in the temple, the lives and struggles of temple wives, efforts to "modernize" and enhance the appeal of traditional sectarian teachings, temple finances, lay-clerical relations, and the elaborate, lucrative funeral rituals that are the heart of temple life. Although focused specifically on various aspects of one of the smaller denominations of Japanese Temple Buddhism, Tendai, Covell covers many of the features of Temple Buddhism that are pan-sectarian in nature, utilizing examples drawn from a wide spectrum of denominations in order to construct a detailed picture of Buddhist life in contemporary Japan. Most of what Covell concludes about his Tendai-specific subjects, therefore, is relevant for all the streams of Temple Buddhism, albeit with some modifications. In addition to using the relatively limited secondary literature in Japanese and English, Covell draws upon his own experiences training as a Tendai cleric in several settings in Japan and carefully mines a wide array of important but terribly underutilized written sources, including, popular Tendai tracts, denominational publications, and such clerical professional organs as ***Ch?gai nipp?***, ***Bukky? taimusu***, Jimon k?ry?*, **and** Gekkan j?shoku_. The combination of personal observation, interviewing, and wide reading enables Covell to give us a nuanced, balanced picture of contemporary temple life.

Taking at least a partial clue from James Laidlaw's excellent study of the contradictions inherent in Jain ethics, ***Riches and Renunciation***, Covell accepts the inherent messiness that derives from human life being shaped by multiple, often conflicting moral imperatives. Clerics function as members of sectarian organizations, renouncers, ritual specialists, householders, and managers of small, business-like temples. Each of those realms places demands on the clerics, some of them not easily reconciled. While examining these contradictions and tensions, Covell maintains an admirable sensitivity, empathy, and respect for the various Buddhists that are his research subjects. Given the predominance of negative, dismissive characterizations of Temple Buddhism, Covell's ability to see past the received wisdom, while maintaining his critical edge, is a major accomplishment. From the very first page of the book, Covell moves beyond facile stereotypes about the hypocrisy and decadence of the clerics to consider how, even when children of clerics are "drafted" into temple service as the only possible successor to their father-temple incumbent, they diligently mature into their life of running a Buddhist temple. As Covell eloquently begins his book, he notes that he had expected to find "disaffected, business-oriented priests." What he encountered instead, are clerics like his friend Sh?shin, the son of a Tendai cleric, who was "in the midst of deep soul-searching, seeking for Amida with all his might and reflecting on what his future as the son of a temple priest would be" (p. 2).

An important leitmotif running through the diverse topics covered in the book, according to Covell, is the fundamental contradiction between the stress on monasticism and world renunciation central to the teachings of almost all denominations of Temple Buddhism?"J?do Shin is an important exception not dealt with extensively in the book?"and the post-Edo period acceptance of mar-

ried, non-celibate household life by the vast majority of the clergy within those same denominations. In each of the areas considered by Covell, there is a strong tension between the monastic ideal espoused by most Tendai clerics and the realities of their daily lives, which entails much time caring for their own families, while fulfilling the primarily funereal and ritual needs of their parishioners. Whether dealing with issues surrounding temple succession, complaints about the high costs of funerals, temple succession, or debating the efforts of temple wives and daughters to find recognition for their indispensable contributions to Tendai temple life, the contradictions arising from the dual identity of the clergy, who symbolize a life of renunciation without practicing it for more than brief periods, make successful resolution of the problems all the more difficult.

Covell devotes significant space to the fraught relationship between the parishioners of most denominations of Temple Buddhism and the clergy who run the temples, again focusing on Tendai but extending his discussion more broadly. In two chapters, Covell provides a brief history of parishioner-temple dynamics, examines the current state of that relationship, and gives an in-depth analysis of efforts within Tendai to bolster parishioner support through the "Light Up Your Corner Movement," an educational effort intended to educate the parishioners and encourage more engagement with temple life. As with so many other cases of attempted reform within the Tendai denomination, Covell sees the relative ineffectiveness of this movement as a symptom of the basic double bind facing Temple Buddhism today. Covell concludes, "The inability of the Tendai sect to fully integrate ***danka*** members into active roles is due in part to the continued reliance on ***danka*** members as passive players, and this reliance, in turn, continues because sect officials still envision the sect as a world renouncing organization. Within such an organization, ***danka*** members, who are by definition householders, can only play supporting roles" (p.61). As Covell goes on to argue, due to the limited opportunities for lay engagement, those with strong religious aspirations turn, more often than not, to new religious organizations that appear more able to accommodate them. Even many young Japanese with an interest in serious religious practice and monastic life, as Covell points out, find that organizations like Tendai, with a growing emphasis on family ties as one of the main conduits for upward mobility in the organization, are less appealing than groups like Aum Shinriky? that go out of their way to recruit renunciants while offering them supposedly speedy routes to awakening, spiritual powers, community, purpose, and happiness.

Covell makes clear in his conclusion that much research remains to be done on contemporary Temple Buddhism. Given the groundbreaking nature of Covell's work it is not surprising that he dealt with many topics only in passing. In particular, I think that although Covell has covered the nature of the parishioner-temple relationship to some degree, he has done so primarily through the eyes of the clergy and sectarian establishment. A more thorough look at how the parishioners view the temple clergy, receive and digest the various forms of teaching and outreach be it in the form of pamphlets left in the entranceways of temples, sermons that occur at major rituals, and programs like the Light Up Your Corner Movement annual meetings will help round out our understanding of Temple Buddhism today. Similarly, Covell is clearly aware that succession remains a problem in many temples but does not discuss in detail on the intricate machinations that often are necessary to find a successor to the temple incumbent or how these difficult decisions are negotiated within the family. This problem only grows as more temple sons and daughters find more lucrative and less demanding career paths open to them. In my own experience, ironically, many talented children who have grown up in temples are encouraged by their cleric fathers and temple mothers to "leave home" for a non-temple career, even if this means having a tougher time finding

someone to take over the temple. As the above comments suggest, Covell's book is not an ethnography of temple life, which we still sorely need. That sort of fine-grained look at the day-to-day and year-by-year ins and outs will round out and deepen the picture of temple life that Covell has so skillfully given us in ***Japanese Temple Buddhism***. Finally, it will be worthwhile for Covell and others to extend this sort of research to other denominations of Temple Buddhism. In particular, it is essential for someone to build upon the work of Morioka Kiyomi by extending this sort of study to J?do Shin, a stream of Temple Buddhism that unlike Tendai, S?t?, or Shingon, has not been forced to deal with a historical emphasis on world-renouncing monasticism. Do Shin clerics face the same problems as those from other denominations? Are Shin organizations any more successful, for example, in recognizing temple wives and daughters than Tendai? Have they been better able to integrate parishioners into temple life? Answering those questions will complement and test some of Covell's core theses about contemporary Temple Buddhism.

Now that the book is available in a paperback edition, I wholeheartedly recommend it for courses (particularly upper-division) on Japanese religion or contemporary Buddhist movements, in addition to anyone else with an interest in the shape of Buddhism in Japan today.