



Sources of Japanese Tradition (Volume I)

William Theodore de Bary (Editor) , Ryusaku Tsunoda (Compiler) , Donald Keene (Compiler)

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Volume 1 addresses the development, through the eighteenth century, of Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

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From Reader Review Sources of Japanese Tradition (Volume I) for online ebook

Morgane says

Well, if you want to learn more about the sources of Japanese tradition, this isn't a bad place to start.

Chant Cowen says

I would recommend this to anyone that is interested in Japanese religious traditions/philosophy and culture because this book has a nice amount of information on Buddhism and Chinese religions in Japan.

I should also note that this book goes over a lot of things in Chinese history, so if you're not familiar with Chinese history/culture then it might be a bit harder to follow along but the book fills it in for the people that have little or no prior knowledge of Chinese culture.

Fantastic book!

J. Watson (aka umberto) says

This book didn't interest me at first sight, however, I decided to read it bit by bit wherever it pleased me because it's one of the two-volume set compiled by Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary and Donald Keene. I'm sorry I rarely know the first compiler but I've known Professors de Bary and Keene as the two imminent Japanologists and illustrious Japanophiles whose translated works from Japanese I always enjoy reading. Informed in its preface as "source readings" (p. v), we should take them as such, in other words, each reading being an attempt to explore the topic for in-depth understanding from the texts translated from their original Japanese sources (back cover).

Indeed, I think this book would primarily be of academic benefits to those students pursuing a degree program on Japanese Studies as their project/study/reading assignments followed by further discussions/researches/theses since there're altogether 21 chapters covering innumerable topics on history, religion, philosophy, etc. as we can see from the first three chapters and the main topics as follows:

Chapter I: The Earliest Records of Japan
JAPAN IN THE CHINESE DYNASTIC HISTORIES
THE EARLIEST JAPANESE CHRONICLES
Chapter II: Early Shinto
LEGENDS CONCERNING SHINTO DEITIES
Chapter III: Prince Shotoku and His Constitution
CIVIL STRIFE IN THE LATE SIXTH CENTURY
THE REIGN OF SUIKO AND RULE OF SHOTOKU

Obviously, it's quite formidable to say something in essence on every chapter since, I think, that would be so unimaginably challenging like 21 Herculean tasks themselves that we should need help or guidance from

scholars or professors in Japanese Studies. Therefore, the following three excerpts should suffice and serve as its three glimpses, based on my preferences, on Prince Shotoku's institution, Kukai and His Master, and Testament of an Old Man.

The Seventeen-Article Constitution of Prince Shotoku: (an article selected)

I. Harmony is to be valued, and an avoidance of wanton opposition to be honored. All men are influenced by partisanship, and there are few who are intelligent. Hence there are some who disobey their lords and fathers, or who maintain feuds with the neighboring villages. But when those above are harmonious and those below are friendly, and there is concord in the discussion of business, right views of things spontaneously gain acceptance. Then what is there which cannot be accomplished?

... (p. 48)

Kukai and His Master: (a paragraph selected)

During the sixth moon of 804, I, Kukai, sailed for China aboard the Number One Ship, in the party of Lord Fujiwara, ambassador to the T'ang court. We reached the coast of Fukien by the eighth moon, and four months later arrived at Ch'ang-an, the capital, where we were lodged at the official guest residence. The ambassadorial delegation started home for Japan on March 15, 805, but in obedience to an imperial edict, I alone remained behind in the Hsi-ming Temple where the abbot Yung-chung had formerly resided.

... (p. 140)

Testament of an Old Man: (a topic selected, extract incomplete)

VI. What is the Way of Truth, then, that will be practicable in present-day Japan? It is simply this: Be normal in everything you do. Consider today's work of primary importance. Keep your mind upright. Comport yourself properly. Be careful in speech. Be respectful in manner and bearing. Care for and honor your parents.

(...)

If you have a master, serve him well. If you have children, educate them well. If you have retainers, manage them well. If you have an elder brother, show him every respect; if you have a younger brother, show him every sympathy. When associating with men, be completely sincere. Do not indulge in evil pleasures. Revere those who are superior, while not despising the ignorant. What you would not have done to yourself, do not do to others. ... (p. 475)

What do you think?

James Violand says

You must have a thorough knowledge of Japanese history before you pick up this work. With this precondition, I must say that it is very insightful but too focused on the evolution of all forms of Buddhism. Some parts (especially that dealing with the reactions to Western ideas) held my attention. Other sections I

had to slog through.

Overall, I found the work unbalanced, but then again, perhaps the second volume will make up for the first's deficiencies.

Michael says

Nice text book read, Some nice reference material.

Dennis Overzet says

If you're not versed in Japanese history, try and lay off reading this book until you do. Besides that, it does offer interesting insights in all facades of Japanese society throughout history. Especially interesting for those who want to delve deeper into the matter.

Jee Koh says

Very useful source book, particularly on the evolution of Buddhism in Japan.

Nash says

I got to know this book first in its glorious hard-cover edition (heavy!) when I was at Waseda doing my research last year. And, guess what, I borrowed it from the library almost the whole time I was there and still couldn't finish it! It's a heavy read, ladies and gentlemen! I mean, it is by far the best authority and most recent compilation I could find on Japanese historical account.

There are two volumes of this book, I suppose. But since my interest is more on the development that led to the Tokugawa period, I thought to myself that I would only spend time (and money) on this one (first).

So, today, (Sept 14, 2007), I just got my own paperback copy in my mailbox! I am understandably excited! It's not very often that I decided to order the kind of book that is usually destined to be reserved for the reference shelf in the library! But, here I am! And I found myself so eager to read it as if it's a bestseller! Am I going insane or what? I guess so. I think everyone who's into Year 5 of Ph.D. study is.

Frankly, I don't think I would finish every page of the book, because that would really land me in the asylum. But I think I would probably gulp up everything they write about the warriors happily. I already look through the Table of Content again and found that Chapter 18 and 19 are something that I really look forward to because I'm writing on it now. The 18th covers the Precepts and House Rules of Muromachi Warriors and the 19th is on the life of my accidental hero, Nobunaga.

There are some writing of Japanese aesthetics which I think I would really enjoy, but that I would have to save it for later unless I could use it to complement my work. There are also a lot on Shinto, something that doesn't excite me at all, but I may have to force myself through it a bit.

Well, that's it for now. I'm really, really excited to have this book today! :-)
