

SOFTWARE REVIEW

Center for Japan Studies at Berkeley, *Multimedia Dictionary of Shinto and Japanese Life: Interactive Introduction to Japanese Culture and Classics*. Apple Macintosh CD-ROM. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994. US\$100.00. © Shigeru Handa.

THIS IS ONE of at least two CD-ROM's recently brought out by Scholars Press, indicating that the benefits of multimedia research are becoming available to scholars of Japanese religions. Unfortunately, for those with IBM-compatible PC systems, the disc is available only for the Apple Macintosh.

The driving force behind this particular disc is Rev. Shigeru Handa, a Shinto priest of Ueno Tenmangu in Nagoya. He has developed an informative collection that is easy to set up and use. The interface is attractive and intuitive. I had no trouble installing the program and going from one topic to another, sampling the sights and sounds of Japan—a Noh performance, the sound of traditional musical instruments, a group of people shouting *ban-zai* as their friends and neighbors march off to war, children dressed up to

visit a shrine—from the perspective of a Shinto priest.

The word *Shinto* in the title of this dictionary, however, is somewhat misleading. The topics are not limited to phenomena associated with “Shinto” shrines but include a wide variety of historical, religious, and cultural subjects, much broader than the narrower definition of Shinto as a specific religious tradition. Handa himself admits that to him “Shinto” is practically synonymous with “Japanese culture.” This multimedia dictionary thus gives quick glimpses of various aspects of Japanese life, arranged on hypercards, rather than offering an in-depth source for research on Shinto as a specific religious tradition. One useful feature for scholars is a group of extensive bibliographies, arranged under the five headings of General, Art/Architecture/Ritual, Modern, History, and Theology/Faith.

The opening screen provides the viewer with a number of options. One can page through the cards one by one in order, or one can click on the “Overview” icon, which will offer the options of “history” or “topics.” “History” brings up a chronological spectrum, from which one can click on various topics. Clicking on “World War II,” for example, brings up a video clip of the atomic bomb exploding over Hiroshima.

The “topics” option gives ten subjects:

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|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Modern Situation | 6. Entertainment |
| 2. Outline of Japan | 7. Shinto History |
| 3. Shinto Objects | 8. Shinto Mythology |
| 4. Shinto Festivals | 9. Faith & Grace |
| 5. Events and Customs | 10. Shinto Thought |

Clicking on one of these topics will bring up a longer list of individual subjects each leading to a hypercard. These lists are not alphabetical, but this is not a problem since the lists are no longer than a couple of pages, and one can always use the “search” function if one has a specific topic in mind. Each card has a brief textual explanation of the subject, as well as a variety of visual illustrations. If available (many of the cards include only stills, in color or black-and-white), clicking on the “motion” icon will bring up a short video clip. The information is rather basic, and the most appealing aspects of the dictionary are the video clips and sound, since these functions are not available in traditional books.

As indicated above, Rev. Handa was the driving force behind this project, and it was surely a labor of love. Handa spent some time at the Center for Japan Studies at Berkeley with Delmer Brown and received help from various people in producing the disk, and he has spent countless hours personally gathering, inputting, and arranging the contents, and ironing out software problems. Handa was hampered by bureaucratic obstacles and excessive fees in gaining access to the wealth of useful illustrations owned by various publishers and other organizations. Instead, he took advantage of his position as an active Shinto priest to gather numerous still and video clips on his own, which explains why his wife and children appear in many of the illustrations. This individual effort, while admirable, contributes to a shortcoming of the dictionary—a weakness in depth and detail.

As Handa himself admits, and as a look at the list of “topics” reveals, the contents of this CD-ROM are still somewhat general and the disc will prove more useful as a teaching or classroom tool than for serious in-depth research on Japanese religions. Given these limitations, it is a matter of perspective whether the price of \$100 is expensive or cheap. It certainly is not enough to repay the producer for his noble efforts, yet it is more expensive than commercial CD-ROMs in other areas.

All of this reflects the newness of multimedia publication. The field has not yet sorted out the required tasks, foundation, and expertise—equivalent to the roles of editors and producers for print media—required for the production of mature multimedia research tools. Publishers who pioneer such work will be doing a great service to academia. In short, the work under review is not yet the promised land of multimedia research, but it is nevertheless a promising and appealing step in that direction.

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