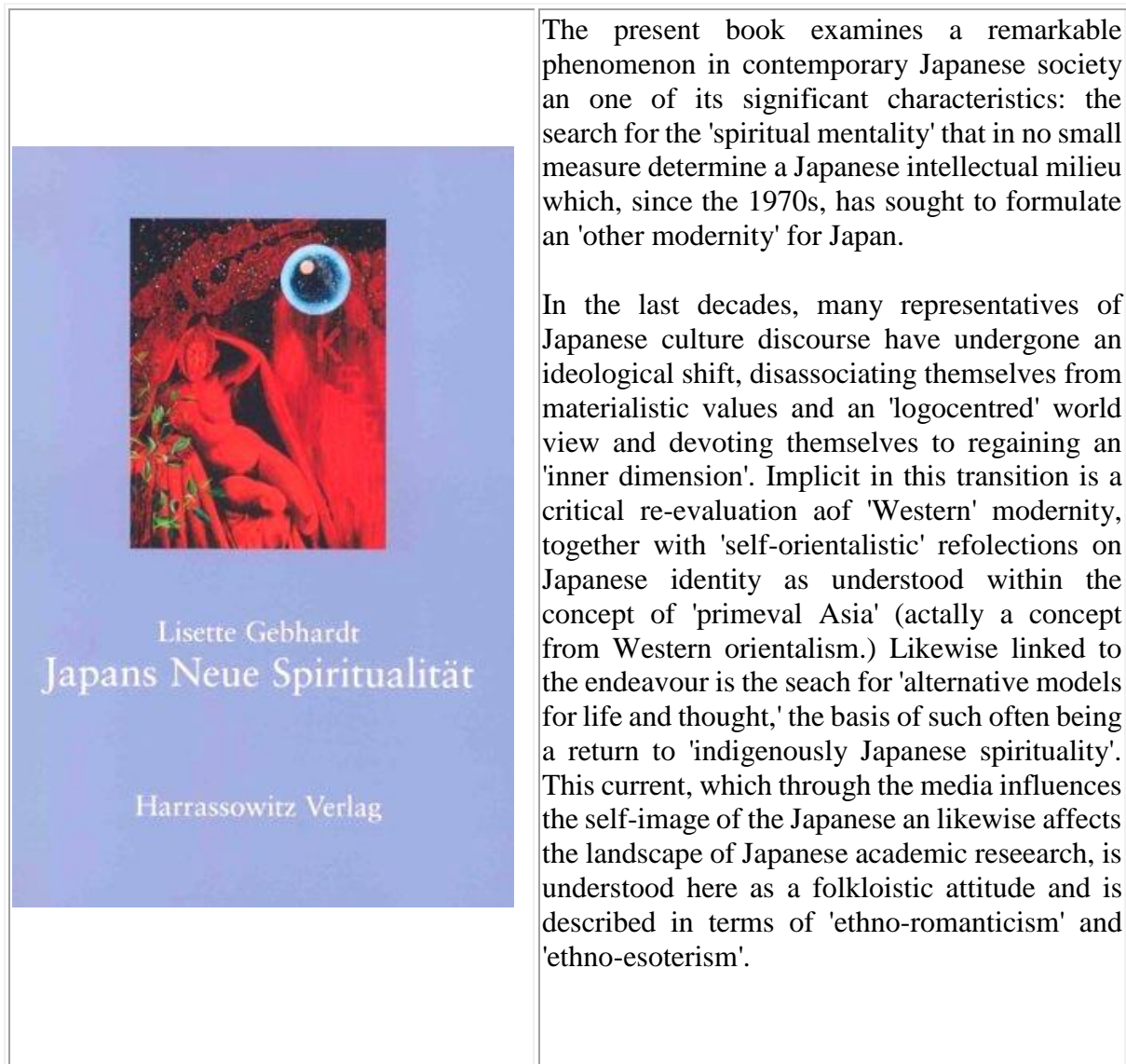


English Abstract

Japan's 'New Spirituality'



The general public, both Japanese and foreign, came to focus its attention on the 'problem' of religion as the result of the poison gas attack carried out in central Tokyo in March 1995, by the neo-religious cult Aum Shinrikyô, under the leadership of Asahara Shôkô. In the years since, designated as the post-Aum Era, signs of a new religious orientation among Japanese intellectuals and artists, as well as the 'occult boom' as a contemporary Japanese social phenomenon, have come under a cloud; the debate about religion and the religious sensibility has taken on a sinister dimension.

Thus, a closely related topic of discussion is the role of those characterised by Shimazono Susumu (University of Tôkyô) as 'spiritual intellectuals'. Included is the question of how the renowned representatives of the 'spiritual discourse' - designated here as 'the spiritual old boys' - are to be assessed in light of their function in the media and of the changing position of 'the intellectual'. In contemporary Japan there is less talk of the chishikijin ('intellectual' in the 'classical' sense) and more of the bunkajin (spokesperson for public opinion, lit. 'cultural person') or the shisôka (prominent thinker). Forming a network through various intellectual and

academic circles and institutions, the 'spiritual discourse' is closely related to 'Japanese post-modernity', its implicit nostalgic nativism/nationalism and its identity industry. An understanding of the phenomenon provides insights not only specifically into Japan's 'spiritual scene', with its links to New Age thought, but also into the cultural life of pre-Bubble and post-Bubble Japan as a whole. The newly gained information on the 'spiritual network' will enable us to recognize argumentations of certain Japanese thinkers, acting in a global setting, as part of a strategy of 'spiritual self-defense' inherent in recent *nihonjinron*.

Though the 'search for spiritual bearings' will in all probability continue in the new millennium as one aspect of contemporary Japanese society, there has been little research into this complex phenomenon, in either Japan or the West. This study, which initially examines talk about religion and 'spirituality' as a manifestation within the Japanese cultural milieu, has its main focus on their literary expression. By probing current texts, it asks what models are being formed by those Japanese authors engaged in the themes of religion, new religions, and 'spirituality': it discusses how the claims inherent in the works of renowned writers, including Ôe Kenzaburô, recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1994, are to be evaluated within the context of a 'new spirituality'. Finally, it is further concerned with the testimony that the authors as participants in the life of the mind bring to the 'spiritual discourse' and to the debate about the 'spiritual search for the self' (keyword: *jibun sagashi*) as a means for 'healing' (*iyashi*) and 'salvation' (*sukui*).

The present documentation of contemporary Japan's 'spiritual' state of mind began with a research interest that was around 1993 focused on a spectacular renaissance of the 'spirits', i. e. a new popularity of the old foxes and badgers, of the Japanese ghosts and the supernatural (keyword: *ikai*), and then further developed into a more comprehensive inquiry into the meaning of 'alternative realities' in present-day cultural discussion in Japan. It reports on the sense of uneasiness with modernity that is generally said to be a characteristic feature of highly technological societies. It proceeds from the premise that nowhere there are flights from modernity that cannot be pursued and understood from an intellectual and sensible perspective.

Lisette Gebhardt, 2004