

BOOK REVIEWS

Buddhist-Christian Relations in Asia. Edited by Perry Schmidt-Leukel. Munich: Editions of Sankt Odillien, 2017. 460 pages. Paperback: ISBN 978-3-8306-7851-9.

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This anthology is timely for a number of reasons. First, we must recognize that there are increasing tensions among Buddhists and Christians in some parts of Asia. Second, there is a significant increase in the number of Asians who self-identify not only as Christians in Asia, but also as Buddhists (especially in mainland China and South Korea). This book is also timely because of the increasing maturity and sophistication of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. As is often the case, not all the essays in a volume such as this are of equal value. The book as a whole, however, makes a valuable contribution to our understanding, especially by documenting the history of, and contemporary events in, Asian countries.

The volume under review includes twenty essays, including Perry Schmidt-Leukel's introduction and a postscript by John D'Arcy May. The essays are based on presentations given at the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies 2015 meeting in Bavaria, and focus on six countries: Japan, Korea, China, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. Each country is given an introductory essay to establish a historical background, followed by essays written by a Buddhist and a Christian based in that country. It is important to note that Schmidt-Leukel requested that a bibliography accompany each essay, and these include materials that are little known and often unavailable outside the country of their origin.

Many of the historical introductions focus intensely on colonialism and its impact on Buddhist-Christian relations today. The privileging of Christianity by Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial regimes in Sri Lanka, for example, helps to explain not only the revival of Buddhism in the nineteenth century but also contemporary relations between Buddhists and Christians in post-civil war Sri Lanka. Various observers have commented on the trauma of

Japanese colonialism and its privileging of Buddhism as the historical background to the extraordinary rise of Christianity in South Korea since 1960. Less well understood is that Buddhism was a marginalized religion under the pro-Confucian Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). The Japanese imposed their own Buddhist institutions upon their colony. In the second half of the twentieth century, an indigenous Korean Buddhism as well as Christianity began to thrive. Myanmar offers another example of the legacy of colonialism. “Burma,” like “Iraq,” was a British colonial invention. In the case of Myanmar, over a hundred ethnic communities were bound into a colony that suddenly became an independent nation in 1948. Today, many Buddhist monks argue that Buddhism is the sole basis for national cohesion in postcolonial Myanmar.

The contributors are well-acquainted with their subject matter, and are either academic specialists or religious leaders in their home countries. Maria de Giorgi, a Catholic theologian with much experience working at the Shinmeizan Center in Japan, comments on the difficulties of addressing doctrinal differences and their implications for social ethics given the Japanese cultural emphasis on harmony. The late Parichart Suwonbubbha, a Thai Buddhist with a doctoral degree in Christian theology, emphasizes what Buddhists and Christians can learn from one another. Martin Repp summarizes the long and complicated history of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Japan. Pan-Chiu Lai takes a more theological approach to Buddhist-Christian relations in China today, using Buddhist doctrinal principles and hermeneutics to develop a Christian strategy for engagement with Buddhists. Hla Myint documents the struggle of a small group of Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar to promote mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation in a difficult situation.

In his postscript, May argues that the future of Buddhist-Christian relations in Asia will have to be seen in the context of an emerging “global civil society” (p. 434) in which the individualism and liberalism that have emerged out of the European Enlightenment have begun to interact with traditional values in what are now postcolonial societies. May is by no means offering a brief for Lee Kuan Yew’s “Asian values versus Western values.” Instead, he argues that committed Buddhists and Christians will have an advantage in the future. Both of these religions, however tarnished by their histories, offer resources to human beings that neither neoliberal capitalism nor socialism with “Asian characteristics” can supply. He also predicts that Buddhists and Christians will increasingly recognize that their differences are more complimentary than antagonistic and, therefore, Asians should turn to an “interactive pluralism.” *Buddhist-Christian Relations in Asia*, then, provides an example of this global civil society.

Rhétoriques de l'hérésie dans le Japon médiéval et moderne: Le moine Monkan (1278–1357) et sa réputation posthume. By Gaétan Rappo. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2017. 490 pages. Paperback: ISBN 978-2-343-08825-9.

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The accusation of heresy is a form of abuse that usually seems intended to justify the might of a more powerful orthodoxy. Self-definition as a heretic does not occur. It is always others who are heretics! Yet without supposed heresy there would be no orthodoxy, and without deviation there would be no norm. Of course, the idea that wrong views should be downgraded or excluded is often sincerely held, for truth and good teaching are held in high esteem. In this sense, differences in doctrine or practice may seem to be most “regrettable,” as suggested in the title of one of Japan’s most famous Buddhist writings, the *Tannishō* 歎異抄 (Notes Lamenting Differences). But sometimes the pot boils over altogether and the resultant culture is one of smears and even violence. The retrospective disentanglement of disputes marked by such “rhetorics of heresy,” to use Gaétan Rappo’s fine phrase, is therefore a complex undertaking indeed.

Rappo explores a classic case of this syndrome, namely the image of the monk Monkan 文觀 (1278–1357), who was presented as an adherent of the much-criticized Tachikawa lineage (Tachikawa-ryū 立川流) of Shingon Buddhism. With surgical precision Rappo unpicks an almost unmanageable mass of data to show that this perception of Monkan was invented in the context of the political power plays of his time and thereafter. Indeed, it transpires that the very idea of the Tachikawa lineage, noted among other things for its use of ritual sex acts, was in part a convenient repository for the ascription of deviance in order to bolster other, supposedly more normative positions of power. In other words, we have here no straightforward tussle between competing orthodoxies, each claiming the other to be herodox. Rather, as we discover in the long run, the ascription of heretical allegiance to Monkan is a function of the power struggle that followed the decay of the Kamakura shogunate.

This subject is shot through with delicate terminological problems of various kinds, and no summary can do justice to Rappo’s judicious treatment in this regard. Although recognizing that all the relevant terms are constructed, as everybody does these days, he does not go down the fashionable track of refusing to use them at all. Indeed, as he recognizes, the presentation of any history requires a modicum of conceptualization and terminology that cannot