

BOOK REVIEWS

FLOWING TRACES: Buddhism in the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan. Edited by James H. Sanford, William R. LaFleur, and Masatoshi Nagatomi. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 275. ISBN 0-691-07365-1.

The “flowing traces” of the title of this anthology is a translation of *suijaku* 垂迹, the second half of the term *honji-suijaku* 本地垂迹, “original ground and residual (or flowing) trace,” usually used to describe Shinto deities as local manifestations of universal Buddhist figures. Here, “flowing traces” is intended to suggest that the Japanese arts can be seen as an emanation of Buddhism—part of Buddhism, yet more than simply an expression of doctrine.

The book consists of nine articles by scholars of religious studies, art history, literature, and theater. Two of the contributions have been published elsewhere and a third has been published in German. William R. LaFleur’s “Symbol and *Yūgen*: Shunzei’s Use of Tendai Buddhism” can also be found in his book *The Karma of Words* (University of California Press, 1983), and Royall Tyler’s “‘The Path of My Mountain’: Buddhism in Nō” appeared in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (March 1987). Together, these two chapters constitute one-quarter of the book. I suspect that some unwary buyers will not be pleased to pay almost \$40.00 for this book, only to discover that some of it is already on their bookshelves. Personally, I have no objection to the third case: Frank Hoff’s “Seeing and Being Seen: The Mirror of Performance” was originally written in English, translated into German and published, and then revised for inclusion in this book.

Since Chapter One, the excerpt from LaFleur’s book, has been available for ten years, I present here only a brief summary. LaFleur discusses the poet Fujiwara Shunzei (1114–1204) and his reworking of the Tendai (indeed, Mahayana) Buddhist doctrine of nonduality in order “to clarify some aspects of the much praised but always elusive aesthetic quality called *yūgen*” (p. 18). In addition to poetry (by Shunzei and others), LaFleur considers two important Buddhist texts, the *Lotus Sūtra* (on *upāya*) and the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* by the sixth-century Chinese T’ien-t’ai figure, Chih-i. LaFleur writes that “in both the *shikan* [meditation] of Tendai and the arts of *yūgen* there is a definite quiescence and tranquility” (p. 40).

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

Chapters Two and Three constitute a nice pair: two well-written and intelligent articles on the *Ippen hijiri-e*, a set of late thirteenth-century scroll paintings comprised of twelve long scrolls that depict the life of Ippen Shōnin, the founder of the Ji-shū of Pure Land Buddhism. In “Nature, Courtly Imagery, and Sacred Meaning in the *Ippen Hijiri-e*,” Laura S. Kaufman, an art historian, first describes the scene (scroll VII, section 2) that shows Ippen preaching at the Shaka-dō in Kyoto. Focusing on the artistic style of the painting, she presents a close analysis of this and two other sections. She also discusses one of Ippen’s poems that appears in the scroll, making two arguments: that the painting and the poem support one another, and that Ippen’s poem is a sophisticated composition, not the work of the peasant that Ippen is often said to be. Kaufman quickly touches on several topics: travel as a religious activity in medieval Japan; the views of famous temples and shrines in the scroll; the “lyrical” quality of the artwork. She concludes with a comparison, not altogether satisfying, between the *Ippen hijiri-e* and the frontispiece illustration for the Medicine-King Bodhisattva Chapter (*Lotus Sūtra*) of the *Heike Nōkyō* scroll. The illustration depicts *kanji* scattered around a pond and *kana* hidden in nearby rocks and lotus petals. Unfortunately, many readers will have a hard time finding the *kanji* or *kana* concealed in the rather blurry illustration (p. 72).

In “Prefiguration and Narrative in Medieval Hagiography: The *Ippen Hijiri-e*,” James H. Foard complements Kaufman’s approach by focusing on the text of the scrolls, rather than the painting. He presents a useful and informative list of the twelve types of written materials that appear (chronology, *setsuwa*, *waka*, *engi*, quotations, and so forth). Foard then uses John J. White’s concept of “prefiguration” to suggest that Ippen’s biography is prefigured by that of Śākyamuni and, more intriguingly, by the *nembutsu* itself.

In Chapter Four, “Coping with Death: Paradigms of Heaven and Hell and the Six Realms in Early Literature and Painting,” Barbara Ruch seeks to demonstrate that, contrary to scholarly opinion, the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth was not the only paradigm of life and death that was vital in medieval Japan. To some extent, I feel that she has constructed a straw man, since surely (despite her citations of Watsuji Tetsurō and LaFleur) many scholars, both Japanese and Western, have long recognized that non-Buddhist conceptions of the afterlife have always animated Japanese religion.

Ruch presents a succinct overview of Japanese views of death expressed in literature, mentioning the *Kojiki*, the *Nihon ryōiki*, the *Tale of Genji*, poetry, and Nō plays. It’s a fascinating topic, and one can only wish for more. She then moves to a discussion of the afterlife as depicted in painting. Among the many paintings she introduces with a few well-chosen sentences and often a boldly original and personal interpretation are paintings and statues of Amida. Next, she treats visions of Hell and visits to Hell.

BOOK REVIEWS

In discussing the *gaki* (*preta* or hungry ghosts), one of the six realms of beings, Ruch astutely observes that in the Sōgenji *gaki zōshi* scroll the *gaki* are “endearing” rather than frightful. She is perfectly right: these hungry ghosts are E.T.’s ancestors, both in physiognomy and personality. And, after all, in modern Japanese, *gaki* is a fairly affectionate term for devilish little children.

In some other respects, however, I would interpret the Sōgenji scroll differently from Ruch. She describes the *gaki* as a normal presence among the townspeople, “benignly ignored as if they were dogs or cats.” No, the *gaki* are not simply ignored, they are *invisible*: the townspeople can’t see the hungry ghosts and that is why the humans look so “cheerful, plump, and full of energy” as they go about their business, including defecating, surrounded by *gaki*. The invisibility of the *gaki*, it seems to me, is precisely the point of the very first scene of the Kōmoto scroll. A noblewoman has just given birth in a room with female attendants and one *gaki*. I like to imagine that the *gaki* has come to eat the baby’s placenta (but a placenta-eating *gaki* is not one of the thirty-six types of *gaki* listed in some scriptures; a blood-eating *gaki* would be the more canonical candidate). The women clearly have no idea a *gaki* is hovering over the baby—otherwise, they would chase it out, like a dog or cat (or something worse!).

Both the scriptures and the folk tradition attest to the invisibility of *gaki* to ordinary eyes. Only monks of great spiritual accomplishment can see the *gaki*. In fact, the important story of the Buddha’s disciple Maudgalyāyana’s (Mokuren) search for his dead mother and his offerings to *gaki* is summarized in the second section of text in the Sōgenji scroll, next to depictions of Mokuren. This is one reason why the “soft, parental-looking Amida” (p. 127, both text and caption to figure 21) seen by Ruch is *not* Amida, but Śākyamuni (Amida’s iconographic twin). The text of the scroll refers to him as *hotoke* (in *kana*) or *butsu* 佛 (in *kanji*) and tells how he offered water and his teachings to five hundred *gaki* gathered by the Ganges River. After drinking and listening, the *gaki* were transformed into heavenly beings. To perhaps belabor the point: it is not the role of the cosmic Buddha Amida to help the *gaki*; that task falls to human monks like Ananda, Maudgalyāyana and Śākyamuni himself, all of whom appear in the scroll.

Ruch notes a contrast between the dreadful, yet miserable, *gaki* of the Kōmoto/Tokyo National Museum scroll and the sunnier *gaki* of the Sōgenji/Kyoto National Museum scroll. This distinction is important, and not often recognized by non-specialists (like me) who, because we can buy small reproductions of the two scrolls put together as one long runner, mistakenly assume that the two scrolls are part of a single piece.

In Chapter Five, Frank Hoff takes Nō as his topic (“Seeing and Being Seen: The Mirror of Performance”). Hoff focuses on Zeami’s writings about how

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

an actor can become one with his audience and how the actor can keep the audience's attention and sympathy. Zeami's concern for and thoughts about the audience remind us that Nō is, after all, a performance and needs an audience. Hoff goes on to discuss parallels between Zeami's acting discipline and Dōgen's religious practice. In addition, he often brings up modern Western views of theater and performance.

Like Hoff, Royall Tyler discusses Nō (Chapter Six, "The Path of My Mountain: Buddhism in Nō"). His essay is one of the two chapters that have already appeared in English; to save space, I again present only a summary. Tyler rightly states that "most people . . . take it for granted that the Buddhism of Nō is simply Zen" (pp. 150–151). He persuasively argues that the Buddhism of Nō is not Zen (as suggested by D.T. Suzuki) but a mixture of Shingon, Tendai, Kegon and Hossō. Faith in Amida, the *Lotus Sūtra*, and Mikkyō (esoteric Buddhism) are especially palpable in Nō. Tyler discusses many plays, emphasizing the importance of sacred geography. The essay is a pleasure to read.

Tyler's article was first published six years ago. I wonder if, after the works of Bernard Faure,¹ William Bodiford,² and others, Tyler today would write that Zen is not "concerned with the Japanese gods" (p. 151) and offer the presence of *kami* in Nō plays as proof that the plays cannot be considered Zen. The very sentence from a play that he cites as a non-Zen (and non-Amidist) position now sounds perfectly Zen (if not yet Amidist): "Gods and Buddhas only differ as do water and waves."

Chapter Seven is Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis's "Chūjōhime: The Weaving of her Legend," in which she follows a legendary eighth-century woman, Chūjōhime, through her transformations in art, literature, drama, and popular belief. Ten Grotenhuis starts with a description of the spectacular Taima mandala, a tapestry made in China in the eighth century that belonged to Taimadera, near Nara. The tapestry shows Amida's Pure Land and scenes from Pure Land scriptures. She then moves to an examination of the earliest pictorial source on Chūjōhime's role in the creation of the mandala, the *Taima mandara engi emaki*. According to the story told in this scroll, the tapestry was woven by Kannon. The *Ippen hijiri-e* mentions the mandala and identifies Chūjōhime as the incarnation of the bodhisattva Seishi. Two Nō plays, attributed to Zeami, feature Chūjōhime: *Hibariyama* ("Skylark Mountain") and *Taema* ("Taima"). In these plays, Chūjōhime is a Snow White figure,

¹ *The Rhetoric of Immediacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) and *Ch'an Insights and Oversights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

² *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993) and "The Enlightenment of Ghosts and Kami," *Cahiers d'Extrême Asie* 7 (1993).

BOOK REVIEWS

condemned by her wicked stepmother, spared from death by a kindly retainer, and abandoned to a life in the wilds. Ten Grotenhuis also presents other paintings and dramatic forms (jōruri and kabuki) that concern Chūjōhime. Finally, the author describes a ceremony performed at Taima-dera, a kind of parade that enacts Amida's descent from the Pure Land. In this procession, a statue of Chūjōhime is first borne on a palanquin and then a smaller statue taken from within the first statue is set on a lotus throne and carried by a participant portraying Kannon.

In Chapter Eight ("Multiple Commemorations: *The Vegetable Nehan* of Itō Jakuchū"), Yoshiaki Shimizu analyzes a painting by Itō Jakuchū (1716–1800) called "Vegetable Nirvana" (*Yasai Nehan*). This large ink painting shows a long radish (*daikon*) lying on its side, surrounded by other vegetables. As the title of the painting indicates, this is a version of an established genre of Japanese Buddhist painting: *nehan-zō*, depictions of the Buddha's parinirvāṇa. In explicating this marvelous painting, Shimizu presents a wide array of information on other *nehan-zō*, the canonical Buddhist sources for the iconography, texts on *nehan* rituals by eminent Japanese Buddhists like Gen-shin and Myōe, and paintings of radishes. Shimizu explains that this painting can be seen as an expression of the important idea that all things, including plants, have Buddha-nature. To make his work even more erudite (and up to date), Shimizu might have included a reference to Lambert Schmithausen's *The Problem of the Sentience of Plants in Earliest Buddhism* (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1991).

It turns out that Jakuchū came from a family of greengrocers. Shimizu suggests that the vegetable nirvana painting commemorated not only the death of the Buddha, but the death of the family business.

Shimizu teaches us a lot about radishes, all of it delectable: radishes as symbols of simplicity; radishes in the history of Chinese and Japanese art; radishes with aesthetic caché in the tea-ceremony world; the botanical approach to radishes in the eighteenth century (as exemplified by Kaibara Ekken). As Shimizu's discussion expertly illustrates, the humble radish had a wide range of symbolic meanings. He writes that "in Japanese culture the radish was never a neutral object" (p. 226) but does not mention that the *daikon* was and still is a phallic symbol. Especially in the Japanese folk tradition, the *daikon* represents fertility, either human or agricultural, and is often seen with the god Daikokuten. I would imagine that to most Edo-period viewers the phallic/fertility associations of the *daikon* in *Yasai Nehan* were stronger and more immediate than the aesthetic and social connotations that Shimizu delineates. The phallic imagery adds another layer of meaning to the already densely meaningful scene and, of course, contributes to the humor in the painting.

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

I would have enjoyed a discussion of other examples of *nehan* art that share the whimsy of Itō Jakuchū's painting or that feature non-humans on their death-beds (or death-baskets). Are there also, say, *neko nehan* (cat nirvana) paintings? Or is *Yasai Nehan* unique in pre-Meiji Japanese art history? Are ironic depictions of the Buddha's death found in China or Korea?

I have seen a drawing by the Meiji artist Ukita Kazue 宇喜多一恵 that is humorous in a gross way: the Buddha is a reclining penis and the surrounding mourners are penises, mermaids, and fish. I take this drawing to be mocking rather than commemorating the Buddha. Yet the very logic of Buddha-nature that allows a radish to stand in for the Buddha would permit a penis too (if painted by an artist with Buddhist credentials). One wonders what kinds of lines Japanese Buddhism has drawn between sacred and sacrilegious art.

I offer some minor corrections to Shimizu's article. He presents erroneous information on the *Neihan-gyō* (*Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*), the most important source for narratives of the parinirvāṇa scene. Shimizu describes the sūtra as a "formidable forty-chapter document compiled by the Chinese monk Ch'ang-an (late sixth to early seventh century)" (p. 206). In fact, the forty-*chuan* (not chapter) translation (T. 374) was made by the Indian (not Chinese) monk Dharmakṣena (not Ch'ang-an—the city name?) in the early fifth century (not late sixth to early seventh century). I might also quibble with Shimizu's description of the sūtra as "comprehensible, if at all, only to the most learned of clerics" (p. 206). If he means that ordinary Japanese people (illiterate, of course) could not read the sūtra, then his description is unexceptional. But he should not imply that the *Nirvana Sūtra* is, as Buddhist scriptures go, incomprehensible. Rather, I would say that it is quite easy to understand, assuming the reader is comfortable with both classical Chinese and Buddhism.

Finally, I have two other questions about Shimizu's interpretation of "Vegetable Nirvana." He writes that "a fruit peeking down from upper-left" represents the Buddha's mother, "Lady Māyā descending from Heaven" (p. 201). What kind of fruit does he see? Lichee? Grapefruit? I wish Shimizu would tell us his own opinion or the consensus of Japanese scholars on this matter. It is true that one of the iconographic conventions of *nehan* paintings is to show the Buddha's mother coming down from her Heaven to see her son. She usually descends from the upper right. What we often see, in precisely the same position as the fruit, is a bag containing the Buddha's belongings that has been tied to the second tree from the left. So I would interpret the fruit as the Buddha's bag, not his mother.³

³ The only problem with this interpretation is that it makes one of the vegetables or fruits stand for an inanimate object, rather than a person. But we can get around this problem by remembering that the Buddha's possessions are contact relics and thus are

BOOK REVIEWS

In Chapter Nine, "Holy Horrors: The Sermon Ballads of Medieval and Early Modern Japan," Susan Matisoff introduces a form of popular puppet theater called *sekkyō-bushi* ("sermon-ballads"). Especially valuable is her summary of three *sekkyō-bushi* texts, *Karukaya*, *Sanshō Dayū*, and *Shintokumarū*. Matisoff includes a brief analysis of the three texts, highlighting the similarities and differences in their structures and themes. Her article is a lucid exposition of a little-known form of literature and performance; we may hope that she is writing a book on the same topic.

Flowing Traces is attractive and well edited. Especially welcome are the thirty-seven illustrations (black and white), which are crucial to several chapters and make the entire book a pleasure. Sad to say, there are no Chinese or Japanese characters anywhere in the book. This is not only regrettable but surprising, since other recent publications by the same press do include characters.

In the introduction, the editors describe the volume as innovative. However, the articles strike me as straightforward and actually rather traditional in their approach. For example, not once do we encounter Foucault, Derrida, Bakhtin, or their friends. Some readers will regret the absence of these thinkers and question how innovative the book really is. For others, the appeal of the book will lie precisely in its accessibility and its light hand with methodology. For anyone interested in Japanese art, literature or Buddhism, *Flowing Traces* offers a cascade of delightful and informative articles.

ELIZABETH KENNEY

imbued with the same sacred power as the Buddha himself. In any event, there are already corn stalks impersonating (so to speak) Śāla trees—another plant, not a human—so perhaps there would be nothing inconsistent with having the fruit represent the Buddha's bag.