

## BOOK REVIEWS

*THE ZEN MASTER HAKUIN: Selected Writings.* Translated by Philip B. Yampolsky. Columbia University Press: New York, 1971, 255 pp.

Dr. Yampolsky, who has already published a translation of the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, now gives us selected translations from Hakuin's epistolic writings. It is evident that he has taken great pains with this work, and they have, I think, been considerably rewarded. Even so, it is not exempt from some mistakes and inaccuracies which I feel to be worthy of comment. It is not my intention to attempt a general listing of these cases. I shall limit myself to a few of the more important misinterpretations I happened to notice, ones which might directly or indirectly mislead readers about the nature of Hakuin's Zen.

The polishing of a tile is to think that as long as one recognizes the non-differentiation of the *ālaya*-consciousness and is not deluded into thinking that this represents the original face, then what is left is a Buddha mind that is like a mirror. People are taught merely that everything is reflected in the mirror just as it is; the crow is black, the crane white, the willow green, the flowers red, and they are told to strive constantly to polish [the mirror] so that not a speck of dust can collect. This wiping away of deluded thoughts night and day is the same as polishing a tile or chasing away the birds that feed on millet. This is known as seeking for the spirit. It permits no chance for the luminescence to be produced that makes clear the mountains, rivers, and the great earth. Practice of this sort was fairly frequent even during the T'ang dynasty. Nan-yüeh's polishing of a tile before Ma-tsu's hut was for the purpose of conveying this meaning to Ma-tsu.

Thus Ch'ang-sha has said in a verse:

The failure of the student to understand the truth,  
Comes from his prior acceptance of spirits.  
The basis of birth and death from endless kalpas in the past;  
This the fool thinks of as the original man. (p. 104)

In the above passage the word-to-word method has made for a terribly complicated translation. The specific complexity of Hakuin's syntax, however, may be held partly responsible. Still, a deficiency of understanding as to Hakuin's

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Zen, along with some semantic error, has made the translation unnecessarily confusing.

Hakuin draws a sharp line of distinction between satori and the precise, unusually clear state of mind which is attained in the course of the intense Zen quest. According to him, the latter is nothing more than the basis for the experience of the *ālaya*-consciousness. It still does not exceed the category of ignorance (*avidyā*). In the search for the former, namely, satori, the latter is the barrier to be broken through at all costs, even though it is extremely difficult to do. It is this break-through that Hakuin emphasizes with regard to Zen practice.

What Hakuin is saying in the above passage is this: There have been and still are many heretical Zen followers who erroneously identify the latter with the former and who are deeply attached to the latter. They try to induce others to scrupulously wipe deluded thought from their minds day and night, until they finally attain an immaculate state of mind. This false approach is precisely what Nan-yüeh criticizes by his symbolic act of polishing a tile, and what Ch'ang-sha condemns in his verse as "recognizing *manas*."

The term "recognizing" 認 means "mistakenly recognizing" or "mistaking" in this connection. The term 識神 means "the subject of awareness," that is, "*manas*" or "mind" as equivalent with *ālaya*-consciousness. "Recognizing *manas*" thus means "mistakenly recognizing *manas* as the original man." The translator's "prior acceptance of spirits" is totally wrong.

The Zen Master Ta-hui has said that meditation in the midst of activity is immeasurably superior to the quietistic approach. Po-shan has said that if one does not attain to this meditation within activity, one's practice is like trying to cross a mountain ridge as narrow as a sheep's skull with a hundred-and-twenty-pound load on one's back. (p. 33)

In this passage Po-shan's comment is mistranslated. It should be: "Po-shan has said that the difficulty of achieving that pondering (*kusū*) within activity is like trying to climb a mountain top as narrow as a sheep's skull with a hundred and twenty pound load on one's back." A word in passing on the term *kusū* 工夫. Dr. Yampolsky translates it as "meditation" and comments that "this term is used to indicate intensive meditation on a koan" (p. 29fn). But the word meditation reminds the reader of the practice of concentrating the mind on some concrete or abstract object. *Kusū* has a meaning which involves quite a different frame of reference. The aim of *kusū* is to break through the duality of consciousness by means of a koan, and not a static fixation of mind. It seems to me that

it would be preferable to discard the word "meditation" as an English equivalent for *kusū*. Terms such as "pondering," "seeking," or "conveying" might be used temporarily for it, but none of them is really sufficient. Perhaps the best answer would be to leave it untranslated, as is the case with the word koan.

One often hears that band of blind, bald fools, that can't tell a jewel from a stone, say things like: "Our very mind is itself the Buddha. What is there to do after we have finished our koan study? . . ." (p. 62)

In this passage, the sentence "What is there to do after we have finished our koan study?" means something entirely different: "Is there any use finishing the koan exercise?"

The introduction to the translation, "Hakuin and Rinzai Zen," should prove helpful for a historical understanding of Hakuin and his place in the history of Japanese Rinzai Zen. If, however, Dr. Yampolsky had given closer attention to the characteristic features of Hakuin's Zen, perhaps even in comparison with such masters as Dōgen and Bankei, I think it would have been even more helpful to readers.

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*THE WHEEL OF LIFE: The Autobiography of a Western Buddhist.* By John Blofeld. Second Edition. Shambala Publications, Inc.: Berkeley, Cal., 1972, 291 pp.

John Blofeld's *The Wheel of Life* is an autobiographical study of one man's search—physically and spiritually—into the world of Buddhism. The first edition of this work appeared in 1959 and in response to an increasing Western interest in Asia has been reprinted with the addition of two new chapters: "The Ox-Drawn Spacecraft" and "Three Grand Lamas." Blofeld's quest led him throughout most of Asia—into China, Southeast Asia, Japan, India and her bordering regions—in pursuit of his own religious growth as a Western convert to the faith.

From his late arrival at his first Buddhist initiation ("as unobtrusively as possible, I crawled to a vacant space in the last row of almost motionless, white-gowned figures," p. 53), to his chase up a hillside in curious pursuit of a young child ("no ordinary village girl, no daughter of the black-clad peasants of Lantao," p. 65), to his remembrance of the Rimpoché's feeding him a dumpling after his final initiation ("I do not think I have ever in my life seen a lovelier sight than