The Myōtei Dialogues: A Japanese Christian Critique of Native Traditions. Edited by James Baskind and Richard Bowring. Volume 151 of Numen Book Series. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016. 214 pages. Hardcover: ISBN 9789004302464.

Myōtei mondō o yomu: Habian no bukkyō hihan 妙貞問答を読む：ハビアンの仏教批判 (Reading the *Myōtei mondō*: Fabian's Critique of Buddhism). Edited by Sueki Fumihiko 末木文美士. Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2014. ix + 487 pages. Hardcover: ISBN 9784831875792.

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The Myōtei Dialogues is a polemical work dating from 1605 written by a Japanese convert to Christianity, Fukansai Habian 不干斎巴鼻庵.[1] It makes a forthright attack on Buddhism, Confucianism (in a broad sense), and Shinto, before making an advocatory presentation of Catholic Christianity as transmitted to Japan by missionaries at that time. The same writer later reverted to Buddhism and wrote an equally scathing attack on Christianity entitled *Ha Daiusu* 破提宇子 (Deus Destroyed). The latter work was presented in English some forty years ago by George Elison,[2] and it is therefore quite a dramatic revelation to have this related but contrary text presented in English after its relatively recent collation by Japanese scholars from various manuscripts. The present translation has been prepared by a team of four scholars, namely the two editors, James Baskind and Richard Bowring, together with John Breen and Hans Martin Krämer. Following the general introduction by the two lead editors, each of the four was responsible for a particular section of this complex work and contributed a specific introduction to the relevant section.

A major publication in Japanese which lies behind the main work under review here is *Myōtei mondō o yomu: Fabian no bukkyō hihan*, edited by Sueki Fumihiko. This work reproduces the original text of the Buddhist section of the *Myōtei mondō*, following the copy held in the library of Tenri University, together with a translation into modern Japanese and several essays. The two by John Breen and James Baskind correspond to those in the English volume currently under review. These essays are in fact not restricted to Habian's critique of Buddhism, but deal with various aspects of

[1] The rendering Fabian is also found.
[2] George Elison, *Deus Destroyed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).

the *Myōtei mondō*. Since the book gives the current state of Japanese scholarship on this subject in general, it is also greatly to be welcomed.

The Japanese title of Habian's work is *Myōtei mondō* 妙貞問答, which means "the questions and answers of Myōshū and Yūtei," these being the names of two women, presumed to be fictitious, who discuss the religious systems known to them at the time. In fact Yūtei, presented as a very knowledgeable Christian, does most of the talking, while Myōshū is presented as an enquirer of Buddhist background who ultimately announces her intention to be received into the Catholic Church. Yūtei is nothing but scathing in her denunciations of the ideas of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shinto, usually as being "ridiculous" or "absurd." Yet such statements are prefaced by very detailed information about these systems, in particular about their cosmological and metaphysical ideas. If the polemics are discounted, the document therefore provides an interesting and more or less independent picture of these traditions as perceived by a Japanese person with a most active mind at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The information is set at the level of concepts and teachings rather than institutions or ritual activities, except in the case of Shinto where considerable reference is made to the powerful Yoshida Shrine in Kyoto, which had recently become dominant.

Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shinto are somewhat misleadingly referred to in the English subtitle as "native traditions." In one sense this is understandable in that these were considered to be under threat, in Japan, by the growing influence of the recently imported Christianity, as is evidenced in the questions and answers in the last section of the book. However, the word "native" is not really appropriate for Buddhism and Confucianism, for these obviously originated in India and China. Ironically, we find that Sanskrit titles, unknown to Japanese people, are used for Buddhist sutras; in such cases they are glossed with the characters of the Chinese version, but surely the Japanese pronunciation of these as *Dainichikyō* 大日経 and so on would have made for easier reading. We do need to recall that Japanese Buddhists were very scarcely familiar with Sanskrit titles as such. Similarly, many Chinese personal names are rendered in their Chinese pronunciation by the editors, although these would not have been directly familiar in Japan. Such an approach may be justifiable when dealing with "Tokugawa Confucianism as an academic discipline," to use Bowring's apparently simple but important phrase on page 31, for this implies serious reflective intent on the part of the Japanese thinkers in question, while at the same time the policy may help western readers to differentiate between Chinese and Japanese proper nouns. Naturally, editors have to take their decisions about such matters,

and some critics are never satisfied, but it is paradoxical that overall the decisions taken here make the text seem just a little less "Japanese," even while the traditions in question are referred to as "native."

In fact, the editors themselves note that the expression "native traditions" should be used with care, but for a very different reason, namely in case it suggests "the illusion of cohesiveness" (p. 15). In recent times there has been a strong fashion to emphasize precisely such cohesiveness in the Japanese religious scene through the centuries, at least with respect to pre-Meiji Japan. It is therefore refreshing to see the editors write that Habian could not bring himself to deal with "Buddhism, Confucianism and Shintō as an amalgam . . . and instead maintained the differences and explained them in some detail" (p. 15). At the same time, it is not really surprising that he did so. For one thing, they were not an amalgam. For another thing, contrary to present fashion, the recognition of a diversity of religious systems had long been presented in China and Japan alike.

This recognition of diversity is evidenced by the very idea of "three teachings" (Ch. *sanjiao* 三教; Jp. *sankyō*), whether these were regarded as being capable of synthesis or rather as rival teachings in competition with each other. The term "three teachings" was used by writers as far apart as Kūkai (774–835) with his apologetic intent in favor of Buddhism and Tominaga Nakamoto (1715–1746) with his early modern critical intent.[3] It also occurs in Habian's text, in the section that deals with Confucianism and Daoism, where it plays a role in a discussion of "the great ultimate" (pp. 136–37). Later, in the conclusion to this section we read, "Of the three teachings Confucianism undoubtedly has much to recommend it. They say the three are one, but Buddhism and Daoism are not worth bothering about" (p. 146). This picks up the classic Chinese expression *sanjiao he yi* 三教合一 (i.e., three teachings uniting as one) but it should always be remembered that this synthesizing resolution of the challenge posed by religious plurality was espoused by some and contested by others. The underlying assumption is that there are distinguishable traditions of teaching (Ch. *jiao* 教; Jp. *kyō*) that can be enumerated and debated. It is interesting to see that in the arrangement of his texts, Habian deals with Daoism, or rather elements of Daoism, in the same section as Confucianism, and that in the overall work a third, separate position is already taken by Shinto. This indicates an implicit transfer of "three teachings" thought to include Shinto.

[3] The relevant writing by Kūkai is his *Sangōshiiki* 三教指帰 (note the variant reading *sangō* rather than *sankyō*), and that of Tominaga is his *Shutsujōkōgo* 出定後語.

When discussing the phrase "native traditions" the editors also suggest that the "strain" Habian may have felt in writing of these distinct traditions from yet another vantage point, making him "an outsider," may have been a factor in his relapse or reconversion to Buddhism later on (p. 15). However it is also remarkable that his treatment of all the Japanese varieties of Buddhism (*buppō* 仏法), including their continental background, is highly informed and very well balanced. In fact, apart from the occasional statement to the effect that Buddhist teachings are "ridiculous," the presentation is thoroughly convincing! Could it be that on re-reading it a little later, Habian found that he was persuading himself of the profundity of the teaching of "emptiness" in the Mahayana sense? His presentation of Christianity is rather less convincing; precisely for that reason it could be more easily transformed in his later work into a refutation of the very same! So, in effect, when he later moved on to his "refutation of Deus," he simply turned his knowledge and judgements inside out. Somehow this makes it less surprising.

Of the four prefatory essays by the editors, all of which are extremely instructive, the most crucial are probably those which deal with Christianity and with Shinto, the first because of the apologetic motive, and the second because of its particular *brisance* and the way in which the relevant section of Habian's work came to light. However, the others are in themselves of equal value.

It is right that James Baskind goes first, on Buddhism, because that is after all the religion to which Habian later reverted. Here the final section is of particular interest, for Baskind sets out clearly how Habian reviews the various understandings of the Pure Land along a spectrum between metaphor and literalism. He comes down in favor of a metaphorical understanding, on the basis that emptiness and nothingness are characteristic of Buddhism, and so is able to declare that the Pure Land cannot compete with the realistic Christian conceptions of an afterlife. How strangely this issue has turned in modern times, after demythologization affected Christian theology but was treated with suspicion by not a few Japanese Buddhists in the Pure Land tradition!

Something similar is going on in Habian's "Searching for God in Neo-Confucianism," to quote the title of Richard Bowring's contribution. The point emphasized here is that Habian does a kind of search within the Confucian tradition, rather broadly conceived, just in case there are any kinds of rival to the Christian concepts of a creator God or a personal soul. He finds that there are not. So while Confucianism (Bowring is quite happy to use the modern "-ism" term on Habian's behalf) gets "high marks" and is largely "benevolent," it can be assigned to the level of a natural philosophy which

poses no competition to the revelation of a creator God and the potential salvation of souls. Nowadays the theology might look a little different on the Christian side, being at least no longer quite so simple as "the Christian idea of a personal soul that relates directly to a deity and that survives into the afterlife" (p. 34), as it is put here. However, as with the Pure Land question, such thoughts point onwards to present-day interactions, beyond the subject with which these high quality essays directly deal.

In his own text, Habian presents Christianity as the best system of teaching, moral behavior, and ritual for achieving a satisfactory afterlife in paradise. Several interesting features of this are well discussed by Hans Martin Krämer, who also translated this section. Krämer points out that Habian not only used key terminology derived directly from Portuguese (notably the Japanese *deusu*, and *paraiso*) but also drew on Buddhist terms such as *zange* 懺悔 meaning "contrition" (and therefore "confession" in the sense of an expression of contrition). Such decisions predate the nineteenth-century invention of alternative terminology for Christianity on the calque principle. Krämer also discusses what Habian "omitted" in his presentation of Christianity, noting especially that the name "Jesus Christ" only occurs once, that the Trinity and the Holy Ghost are disregarded, and that there is no mention of "the Bible." That is quite a lot! The last of these omissions is not surprising, as Krämer admits, since it did not figure prominently in Catholic missions of the time. In fact the very concept of "the Bible" is one that only took on its modern force on the back of the Protestant Reformation. More important in medieval (and indeed later) Catholic religion were the prayer book (with its liturgies and the Psalter) and the lectionary, which consisted of numerous but (it should be noted) selected and truncated biblical passages. Be that as it may, the net result was that Habian's picture of Christianity offers a structurally similar alternative to Pure Land Buddhism. In this picture "Deusu" and *paraiso* in effect take the place of Amida and the western Pure Land. The difference is, according to Habian, that while Pure Land teaching is both absurd and reprehensibly based on "nothingness" just like Zen, the Christian cosmology and route to salvation (including the role of Christ, who gets an honorable mention in that respect) are eminently reasonable.

We turn now to the subject of Shinto. Habian takes apart the cosmogony of Shinto, as found in the *Nihonshoki*, most forcefully and sarcastically. For him, at least as argued here in his polemics against Shinto, the cosmology of Christianity, including in particular its doctrine of creation by a single God, was far more convincing. Habian argued in his Shinto section that its many divinities were really no different from ordinary people, so that all

those stories could in no way explain how the cosmos came into existence. This is a theme that has echoed through later centuries, as the presumed rationality of monotheism continued to attract at least some Japanese intellectuals. The nineteenth-century interest in Unitarianism belonged to the later development of this particular story,[4] but already before this there were internal moves to unify Shinto concepts of divinity, for example in the emergence of Kurozumikyō 黒住教 in the Edo period, with its strong central focus on the sun-goddess Amaterasu. There is no evidence that Habian's critique of Shinto was widely read, but who can fully assess its subterranean workings? It may be argued that the enormously influential work of Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), who sought to give the mythological narratives a new prominence by reaching back from a new intellectual vantage point into romantically conceived origins, was developed from a basis in early modernity by which time various criticisms of Shinto had been in circulation. John Breen, responsible for the translation and introduction of this part of the work, indicates most suggestively the influence of Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725), Andō Shōeki (1703–1762), and Yamagata Bantō (1748–1821) in this regard (pp. 37–38).

Breen also comments pointedly on the way in which Habian attacked the Yoshida School of Shinto, which by then had become much more powerful than the Ise shrines. Quite apart from the way in which Habian's mouthpiece Yūtei ridicules the claims and the activities of Yoshida priests, it was evident by his time that this group, most recently charged with looking after the cult of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) in Kyoto, had become a major new power-base for Shinto and thus a considerable threat to others. It is significant, argues Breen, that the only surviving copies of the *Myōtei Dialogues* were found, rather recently, at Ise itself and in the Yoshida archives in Kyoto. In these circles Habian's work was evidently regarded as a threat from without, and one with which it was necessary to be familiar.

In sum, this fascinating and expertly presented work in English, as well as the Japanese volume mentioned briefly above, is greatly to be welcomed. All four translators and editors deserve to be congratulated on such a significant publishing event. This book will surely provide an important new reference point in our understanding of the intellectual history of Japan. It also provides a key historical reference point for dialogues of the future, even though both style and content have now shifted significantly since Habian's time.

[4] Michel Mohr, *Buddhism, Unitarianism, and the Meiji Competition for Universality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).