

## BOOK REVIEWS

*SHIFTING SHAPE, SHAPING TEXT: Philosophy and Folklore in the Fox Kōan.*  
By Steven Heine. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999. pp. 295.

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In several ways, Steven Heine has been responsible for much of the English language scholarship on the Zen kōan in the past decade. The book presently under review, a wide-ranging exploration of the relation between the kōan and folklore, is the crystallization of ideas Heine first presented several years ago at an American Academy of Religion panel on the kōan. In the wake of that panel, he and Dale Wright began to solicit new scholarship on the kōan, an effort that resulted in the publication of *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism* (2000). Heine and Wright are now editing a follow-up volume, to be called *Zen Canon*, on the many kinds of Zen texts and their uses. Heine has also published *Dōgen and the Kōan Tradition* (1994), reminding readers that the kōan is not the exclusive property of Rinzai Zen.

“Pai-chang and the Wild Fox” 百丈野狐 (Jp. *Hyakujō yako*) is the second case in the *Wu-men kuan* 無門關 (Jp. *Mumonkan*), a kōan collection still in daily use today in Rinzai Zen monasteries in Japan. In this kōan, Pai-chang Huai-hai 百丈懷海 (Jp. *Hyakujō Ekai*) appears as the master of a monastery delivering lectures to his monks. An old man regularly sits behind the monks listening to the lectures, and one day, he reveals to Pai-chang that he is not a human and that long, long ago he himself was the master of this monastery. At that time he was asked by a monk, “Does a person of great cultivation fall into causality or not?” and he replied, “Such a person does not fall into causality (不落因果, Ch. *pu-lo yin-kuo*; Jp. *furaku inga*)” (pp. 203–5). Because his answer was incorrect, he was punished to five hundred rebirths as a wild fox. He then asks Pai-chang, “Master, may I ask you to express a pivot word . . . and release me from this wild fox transfiguration?” Pai-chang then replies, “Such a person does not obscure causality (不昧因果, Ch. *pu-mei yin-kuo*; Jp. *fumai inga*).” With this, the old man experiences great awakening, declaring, “I am now released from my wild fox transfiguration,” and, telling Pai-chang where to find his fox corpse, asks for a proper monk’s burial. Pai-chang later takes his monks outside, discovers the corpse and gives it a proper cremation. At that evening’s lecture, when Pai-chang relates the whole story to his monks, the young monk Huang-po 黃蘗 (Jp. *Ōbaku*) asks what would have happened if the old man had not been mistaken. Pai-

chang replies, "Come here and I will explain [it] to you." Huang-po approaches and before Master Pai-chang can say anything, Huang-po slaps him. The master laughs, "I thought it was only the barbarian who had a red beard but here is another red-bearded barbarian."

This celebrated case raises major philosophical questions. In early Buddhism, a practitioner strove for nirvana, for the cessation of the attachments and ignorance that trapped one in the karmic cycle of death and rebirth. One would then expect the correct answer to be that a person of great cultivation does not fall into karmic causation. Yet this is precisely the wrong answer, for which the old man was punished. The correct answer, "Such a person does not obscure causality," by contrast, affirms that even a person of great cultivation must live within the cycle of karmic causation. As Heine comments, "The correct view recalls Nāgārjuna's view . . . that nirvana is found in terms of causality" (p. 116); however, that comment does not by itself clarify how one can both live determined by karmic causality and yet in nirvana be free of it. A second set of philosophical issues arises in the poems and commentaries that Zen monks have attached to this *kōan*. Master Wu-men 無門 appends the verse, "Not falling, not obscuring: Two sides of the same coin. Not obscuring, not falling: A thousand entanglements, ten thousand entanglements" (p. 204). This verse takes the standpoint of nonduality: if not falling and not obscuring are merely two sides of the same coin, then there is no real distinction between correct and incorrect. Heine summarizes the philosophical problematic: from what perspective should one interpret the *kōan*—the literal perspective implying strict adherence to the principle of causality, or the paradoxical perspective involving "the nondual identity of the affirmation and denial of cause-and-effect" (p. 17)?

At this point, instead of proceeding to discuss the *kōan* entirely in philosophical terms, Heine makes a second approach from an entirely different direction, that of folklore. Folk tradition in both the West and the East contains numerous stories and legends about the fox. In China and Japan, the fox is a shape shifter and although it sometimes appears in a positive light doing good for people, usually it is depicted as sly and crafty, changing its appearance to deceive its victims. In folk religion, the fox is worshipped at shrines where it is an object of reverence and sometimes fear (pp. 26–28, 151–52). Heine points out however that, "In either negative/demonic or positive/beatific senses, the fox is an image reflecting a state of liminality as one undergoes a moral crisis requiring reflection and repentance" (p. 30). That is to say, a fox story in folklore is often a morality tale of sin and repentance. Typically a person gets possessed by a fox and while bewitched, sees only a beautiful maiden or a mansion in the woods, whatever fulfils his or her wishes. When the fox is finally exorcised, the illusory world dissolves and the person is able to see things as they truly are (pp. 38–39, 153–58). Such morality tales have a five-part structure—Possession, Confession, Exorcism, Renunciation and Reflection (p. 162, also p. 39)—and the act of exorcism of the fox is the most important because it corresponds that of repen-

tance. The fact that this five-stage structure can easily be applied to the wild fox kōan both reveals that the kōan is deeply indebted to folklore stories and emphasizes that the fox kōan is not merely a logical puzzle about nonduality but also has a moral dimension which is the unique contribution of the folklore tradition.

After thus locating the fox kōan at the intersection of philosophy and folklore, Heine describes the new views one gets of the Zen world from there. In one direction, one can see the role the Pai-chang kōan played in helping to legitimate Zen in China in the T'ang and Sung periods. In another direction, one gets a sharpened insight into the agenda of Critical Buddhism and its use of Dōgen 道元. And finally, in a third direction, the view brings a re-appreciation of Dōgen's account of the wild fox kōan.

In the late T'ang and early Sung periods, Zen was still reeling from the government persecution of Buddhism of 845 CE and scrambling to defend itself from the Confucian criticism that Zen was antinomian, anti-authoritarian and a generally corrupting (p. 53), parasitic influence on society (p. 83). Heine argues that in defense Sung Zen distinguished between the Zen of authentic enlightenment and an antinomian "wild fox Zen," "a false claim of enlightenment by one still plagued by ignorance and attachment" (p. 16). In the wild fox kōan, Pai-chang not only saves a monk possessed by this wild fox Zen, he also in his institutional role appears as "a charismatic abbot who maintained spiritual authority and authenticity" (p. 53). Other Sung Zen texts revere Pai-chang as the author of the Pure Rules, the original code of Zen monastic life, and the aged master who insisted "A day without work is a day without eating" (p. 54). The fox kōan must be seen as one element in the construction of the image of Pai-chang as "a stern moralist" and "no-nonsense disciplinarian" (pp. 53, 79) as created by Sung-period Zen in its ongoing struggle to legitimate itself (pp. 79–84).

Critical Buddhism attracted scholarly attention on both sides of the Pacific Ocean when its proponents declared "*tathāgatagarbha* thought is not Buddhism" and "Zen is not Buddhism" (p. 111). They argued that the notion of original enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覺), which runs through all of East Asian Buddhism, was inconsistent with basic Buddhist doctrine, centered on the notions of dependent origination, non-self, karmic retribution, causality and impermanence (p. 110). That is, *hongaku* is "metaphysically substantialist". In addition, it is also "morally deficient" (p. 110). Although the nonduality inherent in *hongaku* thought seems to foster a nondiscriminating compassion and equality based on the universal enlightenment of all people, in actual fact, it is incapable of making specific, ethical judgments (p. 112). The result is that despite its noble rhetoric, Buddhism in East Asia supports the status quo, even when that involves "a tacit compliance with militarism" (p. 112) and the tolerance of social discrimination against the outcast community in Japan (p. 111). Critical Buddhism blames Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, shamanistic/animistic folk religiosity and nativist ideologies, which have penetrated into Buddhism and

rendered it incapable of criticizing the status quo. The wild fox is a symbol for false enlightenment based on a naive nonduality and the Critical Buddhists read the wild fox kōan as a rejection of nondual *hongaku* thought. Here they claim to be following the later Dōgen who, they say, rejected the nondual equation of “not falling” and “not obscuring” and opted instead for a deeply moral view of karmic reward and punishment (p. 115). Heine points out numerous difficulties in the Critical Buddhist position, but one of the most embarrassing is that while the Critical Buddhists blame the pernicious influence of folklore on Buddhism, it is this very folklore influence in the fox kōan which provides the moral element (pp. 117, 126).

Dōgen discussed the fox kōan twice. In the *Daishugyō* 大修行 fascicle of the 75-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏, written in the 1240s, he argued for the nondual identification of “not falling” with “not obscuring”. But in the 12-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō*, written in the 1250s, he rejected the nondual position and argued for the correctness of the “not obscuring” view alone. Did Dōgen have a “change of heart” between the two writings? If so, why? Heine, a specialist on Dōgen texts, rehearses all the interpretations and arguments in great detail. For me, the point of interest is that, in Heine’s understanding, Dōgen asserts in the *Jinshin inga* 深信因果 that although the law of causality is inescapable, “it is based on the subjective experience of deep faith (*jinshin*)” (p. 116), “the continuing process of moral purification perfected within the realm of causality” (p. 116). In the usual Rinzai commentaries on the fox kōan, this is a new element. Very few ever mention deep faith.

Heine provides two appendices, “Translations of Fox Kōan Commentaries,” and “Translations of ‘Pai-chang’s Monastic Rules’” as well as a detailed list of Sino-Japanese terms with Chinese characters (there are still scholarly presses who think Chinese characters unnecessary) which should satisfy the needs of traditional text and history scholars. But the originality of Heine’s book is that he views Zen texts and history from the angle of fox folklore and proves that this allows us to see clearly much more of what was hitherto unrecognized.

The book is not without its faults. It is often repetitive, the same discussion appearing in two different places (note the double page number citations in this review). A chapter on “Unconcluding Methodological Reflections” is so general it seems unrelated to the fox kōan. Myself, I wanted to see more discussion relating the second half of the kōan, Huang-po’s slapping of Pai-chang, to the first half, Pai-chang’s releasing the fox. Kōans can often be divided into two parts, one half making its point as *shōi* 正位, “straight” or “real”, and the other as *hen’i* 偏位 “crooked” or “apparent.” If one views the fox kōan as having two halves, relating straight and crooked (or vice versa), what does one see? And perhaps I missed it, but did Heine explain the textual paradox: through Pai-chang’s assertion that one cannot escape karma, the old man escaped his karma (pp. 67–68)? Pai-chang’s utterance, in deed, accomplished what, in words, it said could not be done. To explain that is to explain how a kōan works.