

BOOK REVIEWS

ZEN AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES. By Masao Abe, edited by Steven Heine. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997, pp. 224. ISBN 0 8248 1832 6 (pbk)

JAMES L. FREDERICKS
Loyola Marymount University

PROFESSOR MASAO ABE has now provided us with the second of a two-part sequel to his monumental *Zen and Western Thought*. Like *Zen and Inter-religious Dialogue* (the first of the two sequels), this volume happily bears many resemblances to *Zen and Western Thought*. The essays were previously published over a number of years and have to do with his comparative approach to Buddhism (particularly Zen), Christianity and western philosophy. Given its genealogy, this volume carries with it no surprises. Professor Abe's essays are clearly organized, precise and fair in their judgments and always engaging.

The essays have been sorted into four sections. Some have to do with teasing out basic themes in Buddhism, such as the notion of emptiness in the Madhyamika school and the Prajñāpāramita literature. Other essays are more explicitly comparative. Professor Abe writes on subjects as diverse as process thought, the meaning of death and Jungian psychology. The final section, which contains essays on Zen and Japanese culture, brings to mind Professor Abe's debt to D. T. Suzuki and Hisamatsu Shin'ichi. Along the way, Professor Abe's conversation partners include Buddhist figures (Nāgārjuna, Lin-chi, Chao-chou and Dōgen), western thinkers (Aristotle and Plato, Nietzsche, Whitehead and Jung), and Christian thinkers (Paul, Pseudo-Dionysius and Hans Küng). Professor Abe's critique of Christian theism is well known and restated several times in the volume under review. In Professor Abe's view, Christian theism is not the standpoint of Buddhist emptiness. Even when the paradoxical immanence and transcendence of God is taken into account, the Christian God is inevitably grasped "somewhat objectively" and therefore "is not completely free from reification and substantialization" [p. 47].

The observations regarding Professor Abe's position which follow reflect not only my commitments as a Christian theologian, but also my limited un-

derstanding of Buddhism. I believe Professor Abe is correct when he notes the traces of dualism which remain in Christian theism. Christianity, however, cannot embrace fully the standpoint of Professor Abe's Zen, for to do so would be to surrender the eschatological dimension of its own religious standpoint. When all is reduced to an "original naturalness" (自然 *jinen*) or "true suchness" (眞如 *shinnyo*), the eschatological dimension of religious existence is lost. What Christian believers call "waiting in joyful hope for the coming of the Kingdom of God" must be seen as a defilement (煩惱 *klesa*) from the standpoint of Zen. With the loss of the eschatological, Zen is left with a diminished appreciation of the individual as a moral agent and social being acting within history. According to Professor Abe, the weakness of Christianity is that it cannot overcome the duality of good and evil and is saddled with an eschatological hope in the triumph of the supreme good. Zen, on the other hand, leads to awakening to "that which is neither good nor evil" [p. 47]. Zen "completely overcomes the duality of value judgment in the axiological dimension . . . and thus reaches the religious dimension, which is entirely free from the notion of absolute good" [pp. 47-48].

The eschatological and ethical dimensions of religious existence are problems not only for Professor Abe, but for the Kyoto School more generally. The issue can be seen in Nishida Kitarō's choice of the metaphor "place" (場所 *basho*) for modeling absolute nothingness. Absolute nothingness, construed as "place," succeeds only too well in overcoming dualisms in the quest for the "suchness" and "original naturalness" of all. In overcoming duality, however, the place of absolute nothingness also overcomes the eschatological and the ethical dimensions of the religious existence. "Place," I hasten to note, is not the only metaphor for absolute nothingness in the tradition of the Kyoto School. Tanabe Hajime criticized Nishida's notion of "place" for its inability to grasp the ethical and eschatological dimension of religious existence adequately. For Tanabe, absolute nothingness arises in the transformation (懺悔 *zange*) of individuals in their concrete social and historical context. Unfortunately, Nishida's thought has generally eclipsed Tanabe's. Professor Abe is now working on a book devoted to the Kyoto School. In past publications, Professor Abe has underscored the shortcomings of Tanabe's thought in comparison with Nishida's view of absolute nothingness. For Professor Abe to treat Tanabe's thought in some depth, especially the ethical and eschatological implications of Tanabe's philosophy, would be a noteworthy event in the contemporary development of the Kyoto School.

The problem of the eschatological and the ethical in Professor Abe's interpretation of Zen must not be taken out of its proper context. For some decades now, Professor Abe has worn not only the mantle of D. T. Suzuki as apostle of Zen to the West, but also the mantle of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi in the

BOOK REVIEWS

quest for a contemporary Zen humanism adequate to the religious needs of the world today. In addition, this collection of essays offers eloquent testimony to the truth of Langdon Gilkey's appraisal of Professor Abe as one of the leading Christian theologians in the world today. By any measure, Professor Abe is one of the great figures in the current dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity. These essays will only confirm this assessment.

THE SCRIPTURE OF THE TEN KINGS and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism. By Stephen F. Teiser. Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 9. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 1994, pp. xxiii + 340. ISBN 0 8248 1587 4

JAMES ROBSON
Stanford University

SOMETIME BETWEEN the 7th and 10th centuries a new cast of characters appeared in Chinese depictions of the netherworld. By the 10th century the deceased no longer merely returned to the soil or went to the Yellow Springs, but were instead required to pass through a huge underworld tribunal consisting of ten courts. In each of these ten courts presided a figure that bore a striking resemblance to magistrates that the deceased would have encountered in the contemporary Chinese bureaucracy. The members of this netherworld judicial system were collectively known as the ten kings. Many of the images of these subterranean courts are now more familiar to us from the recent articles and books by Stephen F. Teiser, who has served to some extent as our modern day Mulian. Judging from other recent studies on the Chinese afterlife by Anna Seidel, Albert Dien, and Ursula-Angelika Cedzich, among others, in addition to the work of Jacques Le Goff, Phillipe Ariès, and Alan Bernstein on Western materials, Teiser does not exaggerate when he says that the topic of "death has come back to life" (p. xv).

The book under review, *The Scripture of the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism*, would appear from its title to be a study and translation of a noncanonical medieval Chinese Buddhist text.¹ While Teiser provides both an excellent translation and an analysis of the content of the scripture, the reader soon discovers that the text itself is not the main focus of this study. In fact, it is precisely the other issues and topics

¹ Hereafter I will refer to Teiser's study as *The Making of Purgatory*, and the Tun-huang text as the *Scripture of the Ten Kings*.