

## BOOK REVIEWS

of Jesus not be clouded (nebula) to our understanding? Indeed, how can one trust in the unsupported air of a Mahāyāna emptiness? How can one abandon all attachments? These issues are not newly discovered; they are obstacles traditionally associated with the practice of mystic prayer in the entire tradition of mystic theologians, from Jesus through Gregory of Nyssa and John of the Cross to Thomas Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh.

Mahāyāna thinkers frequently describe their deepest insights by using the term "only" (*mātra*). They speak of worldly convention only (*saṃvṛti-mātra*), or conscious construction only (*viññapti-mātra*). Yet this "only" is not meant to deprive anyone of anything real at all. It signals not privation, but rediscovered fullness. It sloughs off misleading addictions and deluded ideas about what in fact is real, about our grasp of reality. To metaphysicians, however, this "only" or "merely" signals privation, and triggers a metaphysical nostalgia. Who would not prefer to dwell in the solid, unmovable towers of self-assured certainty?

Resist! The task of modern theology is not to seek familiar comforts, but to develop the hybrid strength to abandon false supports and thrive in a world that is devoid of privileged enclosures. O'Leary well knows this. That is, I think, why he lives in Japan.

### Response to Robert F. Rhodes' Review of *Madhyamaka Thought in China*

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I HAVE JUST come across Robert F. Rhodes' review of my book *Madhyamaka Thought in China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994) in *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1997). As I find most of the criticisms which the review raises misdirected and groundless, I feel obliged to respond.

The objections which Rhodes raises fall into two categories, one concerning the structure of the book and the other concerning the historical information that the book provides. Regarding the structure of the book, Rhodes complains that "each of the chapters is a self-contained unit," that "no attempt is made to relate the doctrines of one school with those of the others," that "also lacking is any attempt to discern how the different schools influenced each other" (p. 299). That Rhodes reads each chapter as "a self-contained unit" is his choice, but that is not the way the book is intended to be read. The book comprises four chapters forming an organic whole, with Chapter One

providing the background and Chapters Two, Three, and Four dealing respectively with the three stages of development (advent, revival, transformation) of Chinese Madhyamaka thought as exemplified by the teachings of their representative figures (Seng-chao 僧肇, Chi-tsang 吉藏, and Chih-i 智顛). The aim of the book is clearly stated in its preface:

The principal aim is to locate an ideological nucleus and to discover a general pattern of development, by referring to which the precise significance of the chief theoretical elements and the exact relation between the main doctrinal aspects of a broad Buddhist intellectual trend can be clearly demonstrated and accurately defined. (p. x)

This aim would certainly be lost to a reader who cannot see the forest for the trees. It is absolutely not true that I have not tried to relate the doctrines of one school with those of the others. To mention but one example, I, on discussing each of the doctrines of Chih-i (538–597) of the T'ien-t'ai School 天台宗, always make it a point to compare it with the view of Chi-tsang (549–623) of the San-lun School 三論宗. So I draw attention to the close parallels between Chih-i's *p'an-chiao* teaching of five periods and Chi-tsang's *p'an-chiao* teaching of four periods (pp. 200–201), comment on the similarities and dissimilarities between the two masters' opinions about the *Lotus Sūtra* (p. 200, p. 205), note how Chi-tsang's thought shows features typical of Chih-i's "round teaching" (p. 216), contrast Chih-i's practical with Chi-tsang's theoretical approach to reality (pp. 225–226), compare the two masters' teachings of three truths (p. 277), and so forth. It is also not true that I have not looked into the way different schools influenced each other. Allow me to take my treatment of Chih-i again as an example: Before entering into the thought of Chih-i, I spend a whole section on its Madhyamaka connection, in which I describe in detail Chih-i's contacts with the key figures of the San-lun tradition, including Chi-tsang (pp. 189–196).

Regarding the historical information which the book provides, Rhodes voices his dissatisfaction with my "not providing an adequate discussion of the historical context in which Chi-tsang's thought developed" (p. 300). That Rhodes would have voiced such a complaint, after I have devoted whole sections of the book to highlighting Chi-tsang's role in the revival of the San-lun tradition (pp. 82–88) and to analysing Chi-tsang's attitudes toward other dominant doctrinal traditions of his time (pp. 88–99), defies understanding. The same is the case with his reference to my "lack of attention" to the "more praxis-oriented" Chinese Madhyamaka lineage (p. 300), seeing that I have spent a full page delineating this "lineage" (pp. 188–189). To be sure, I have not given an account of the teachings of this lineage; but then it is not because I do not want to, but because the materials necessary for writing such an ac-

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count is not at present available. I admit also that my delineation of the life histories and achievements of the representative figures of this lineage is sketchy; but then my book is on Chinese Madhyamaka *thought* in particular, not on Chinese Madhyamaka history in general.

Finally, Rhodes suggests that I should take "a closer look at the specific moves through which Chi-tsang sought to establish his system as the normative one for the San-lun sect" (p. 300). Judging from the biographies and writings that I have studied, Chi-tsang did not seem to have any awareness of the existence of two separate systems within the San-lun tradition, not to say to initiate moves to promote the fortunes of one at the expense of the other. I would guess that Rhodes is naively reading into the history of the San-lun tradition features pertaining to the histories of later Chinese Buddhist schools, such as those of the Ch'an School 禪宗. But my guess may be wrong. If this is the case, I would be most grateful if he would enlighten us on the subject.

Rhodes is right when he writes that my book "is far from being the definitive work on 'Madhyamaka Thought in China'" (p. 300), but it does deserve, in spite of its many imperfections, more careful and responsible treatment from reviewers.

A copy of this response has been sent to Professor Rhodes. I look forward to his replying.

### A Response by Robert F. Rhodes

I WOULD LIKE to begin by thanking the editors of *The Eastern Buddhist* for providing me with an opportunity to reply to Professor Lui's comments. Let me begin by stating that I would be the last person to insist on the absolute correctness of my views on Liu's book. It is my belief there are as many readings of a book as there are readers. Ultimately I must ask each reader of this response to decide for herself whether the views expressed in my review (and Liu's response to them) are justified, on the basis of her own reading of the book.

Having said that, let me address some of the points that Liu raises against my review. First, Liu objects to my characterization of his book as a series of self-contained units treating Seng-chao, Chi-tsang, and Chih-i. After looking over the book, I still think my characterization is valid. Liu says that he compares the views of Chi-tsang and Chih-i at crucial points, but a line or paragraph referring to Chi-tsang thrown in the midst of a relentless exposition of Chih-i's system hardly constitutes a systematic comparison of the two thinkers.

Second, concerning my position that Liu has failed to provide an adequate