

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

MIRACULOUS STORIES FROM THE JAPANESE BUDDHIST TRADITION: *The Nihon Ryōiki of the Monk Kyōkai.* Translated and edited by Kyōko Motomochi Nakamura. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973, pp. 322. ISBN 674-57635-7

MIRACULOUS TALES OF THE LOTUS SUTRA FROM ANCIENT JAPAN: *The Dainihonkoku Hokekyōgenki of Priest Chingen.* Translated and annotated with an introduction by Yoshiko Dykstra. Osaka: Kansai University of Foreign Studies, 1983, pp. 159. ISBN 4-87335-002-6

SAND AND PEBBLES (*Shasekishū*): *The Tales of Mujū Ichien, A Voice for Pluralism in Kamakura Buddhism.* By Robert E. Morrell. New York: State University of New York Press, 1985, pp. 383. ISBN 0-88706-059-5

There is a genre of Japanese religious literature of relevance and interest to specialists and others in the fields of Japanese Buddhism, literature, religion, history, and folklore, yet which can be overlooked in a survey of major Japanese literature. This genre known as Japanese Buddhist tales (*setsuwa* 説話) includes fascinating collections of legends, narratives and stories on Buddhist-related themes. These tales can serve as informative “windows” allowing us a glimpse of Japanese life and religious practices of the day which are not found in the official histories or major literary works that are more often the focus of scholarly attention.

The earliest work of this genre in Japan is Kyōkai's *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記 (Miraculous Tales from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition) (ca. 822). It was followed by such works as Chingen's *Dainihonkoku hokekyōgenki* 大日本国法華経験記 (Miraculous Tales of the Lotus Sutra from Ancient Japan) (1040?), and *Ōjōden* 往生伝 (Tales of Rebirth). The highest level of sophistication of this popular genre, though the themes were not limited to religious topics, was achieved in works such as the *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語集 (Tales Old and New) (ca. 1106), the *Uji shūi monogatari* 宇治拾遺物語 (Tales of Uji) (early Kamakura), and Mujū's *Shasekishū* 沙石集 (Sand and Pebbles) (1283). Recently, three of these works have appeared in English translation.¹

The first of these translations, appropriately enough, the *Nihon ryōiki*, sets

¹ Other related works not covered in this brief review include D. E. Mills (tr.), *A Collection of Tales from Uji: A Study and Translation of Uji Shūi Monogatari* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), and Hartmut O. Rotermund (tr.), *Collection de sable et de pierres: Shasekishū* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

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a high standard of academic excellence. Nakamura Kyōko provides not only an eminently readable translation of the text with accurate and helpful notes, but also gives us a fascinating introduction to the background of the author and his times. She places the work within the context of earlier Japanese and Chinese literature, and discusses the philosophical and religious world view which underlies the often mundane stories. As icing on the cake, detailed information is provided in the appendices, a full bibliography, and index.

The stories in the *Ryōiki* revolve around the theme of karmic retribution, and mostly concern little known or anonymous figures who are magnificently rewarded for righteous acts or violently punished for misdeeds. The stories and patterns it contains were incorporated by later works, which makes it all the more important and satisfying to have such a proficient work available both for reference and just plain enjoyable light reading.

The translation of the *Dainihonkoku hokekyōgenki*, a collection of stories concerning famous and not-so-famous figures associated with the Lotus Sutra, is quite readable but would have benefited from the services of a good editor. Diacritical marks are inconsistent; the "Eastern Pagoda" district on Mount Hiei, for example, is given as "Toto" on p. 41, "Tōto" on p. 42, and finally, correctly as "Tōtō" on p. 50. Notes, especially those on Buddhist subjects, are often inadequate or misleading. For example, on p. 22, notes 2 and 7 both deal with Chih-i (mistakenly given here as "Chi-i"), the first describing him as "the founder of the T'ien-t'ai Sect in China" and the other stating he was "the third patriarch in the Chinese T'ien-t'ai Sect." Scholars should be cautioned against using the work as a source of information about Japanese and Chinese Buddhism. It is news to this reader, for example, that Kumārajīva is "regarded as the founder of the Sanron Sect" (p. 22, note 4), or that Chih-i's *Mo ho chih kuan* is a commentary on the Lotus Sutra (p. 22, note 7). Further, there is no indication in the translation or notes that most of the text on pp. 30–31 is a direct quote of Saichō's *Ganmon*, or *Vows*. Finally, the bibliography lists a number of obscure works, but it does not mention the English translations of the Lotus Sutra by Hurvitz, Murano, or Katō.

Nevertheless, it is convenient to have another example of this genre in English translation for those who do not read Japanese. The text contains many delightful stories of people and animals, and the rewards to be gained from having faith in the Lotus Sutra. It contains the earliest version of the story (No. 129) about the jealous woman who turned into a giant snake and wrapped herself around the temple bell under which hid the young priest who was the object of her affections, a story later adopted in the famous Kabuki play *Dōjōji*. It also provides many examples of "mountain religion," the tradition known as Shugendō, and is thus an important source for Shugendō studies.

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Robert Morrell's work on Mujū's *Shasekishū* is of particular value and interest to the student of Japanese Buddhism. Part I gives a lively biography of Mujū and an outline of the "world of ideas" in which he lived. Parts II and III are translations and summaries of the *Shasekishū* and the *Zōtanshū* 雑談集 (Miscellaneous Stories). As the subtitle, "A Voice for Pluralism in Kamakura Buddhism," indicates, not all Kamakura Buddhists were involved in or accepted the trend toward "single practice," as represented by the "single recitation" Amidism of Shinran, the "sitting-only" Zen of Dōgen, or the "daimoku alone" Lotus Sutra faith of Nichiren. In his informative introduction, Morrell argues that Mujū was a pluralist who recognized the contributions and roles of all Buddhist schools and traditions—a standpoint equally relevant in today's religiously plural world. Mujū clearly states his position in the following story from the *Shasekishū*:

Recently a monk with a reputation as a scholar of the Three-Treatise (Sanron) doctrines remarked to a colleague: "While each of the other sects holds to the one-sided view that its teacher is superior, only my Three-Treatise position does not have this bias."

The statement itself is biased! He is saying in effect that the other sects, because each maintains a particular viewpoint, are inferior. *His* sect does not support any particular philosophical position and is therefore superior. This is bias indeed! It is like saying in the Hall of Silence, "There is to be no talking." (p. 139)

As Morrell indicates, Japanese Buddhism has not been without its "singleminded zealots," and he decries the loss of Mujū's "Principles of Accommodation" in Japanese Buddhism, post-Kamakura as well as modern.

The stories in the *Shasekishū* are delightful and even earthy, and Morrell translates with a light touch which allows one to enjoy the stories without being aware of them as translations. Readers will surely enjoy the double entendre of "The Nun Who Praised a Preacher" (p. 184), or the down-to-earth practicality of "The Preacher Who Praised a Breaking of Wind" (p. 187). The *Shasekishū* contains many stories about famous figures, such as Saigyō, Confucius, Myōe, and Vimalakīrti, as well as anonymous men and women, wise and foolish; essays on poetry and on the native gods; and puns, witty comments, and words of wisdom concerning many aspects of the vast Buddhist tradition. Morrell's work provides the reader with a wealth of information and insight about Kamakura Buddhism and medieval Japan.

There are many other texts in this genre worth rendering into English, but these three translations make a good beginning. As works that can be read profitably by specialists and non-specialists alike, I would encourage all who are interested in Japan and its religious traditions to enjoy these gleanings from

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times past, and to taste, if only for a moment, another world that is both similar and dissimilar to our own.

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THE SWORD OF NO-SWORD: Life of the Master Warrior Tesshu. By John Stevens. Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1984, pp. *xii*+171. ISBN 0394-72770-3 (paperback)

Yamaoka Tesshū was a dominant political figure during the early Meiji period of Japan. He negotiated the surrender of the Shogunate to the Imperial forces at the end of the brief civil war of 1868, and went on to serve as an advisor to the Emperor. He was a great swordsman, and the principles of *kendō* (swordsmanship) which he taught are followed by *kendō* teachers today. He was a superlative calligrapher, and an ardent student of two prominent Zen Buddhist teachers of his time.

John Stevens has put together an interesting biography of this versatile figure from a variety of sources, most of them rather unreliable, for Tesshū did not write an autobiography or keep records designed to help biographers. Picking through third-hand accounts and some original records that are still available, Stevens gives us an account of Tesshū that rings true, while acknowledging that a few of the details cannot be verified and a few of the stories may be apocryphal.

Though we are given a clear picture of the paradoxical man Tesshū, the swordsman who taught "No Sword," the penniless statesman, the Zen student who died an alcoholic at 52, the warrior who was also an artist—it is nonetheless an uncritical presentation. We need another book to give us cultural, historical, and psychological interpretations of the contradictions in Tesshū's extraordinary life. Such a book might begin with a history of sword-fighting, and could, perhaps, show how elements in this history play themselves out in his story.

The *Mutō* or "No Sword" school of *kendō* did not originate with Tesshū, though he refined it beyond earlier formulations. With the many changes in Japanese culture following the importation of Zen Buddhism in the thirteenth century and its spread through the ruling class, and with the introduction of firearms three hundred years later, *Mutō* developed first as a way of disarming another without using a sword, and later as a way of self-development by us-