

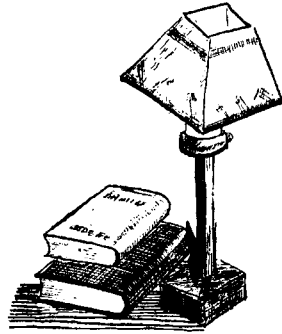
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Zen for the West

By Sohaku Ogata

New York; The Dial Press, 1959

182 pp. \$3.50



“Zen for the West” by Sohaku Ogata is a timely publication. After a rapid reading I found, on the one hand, the following favorable points:

1. The characteristics of Zen are certainly presented in a way that will satisfy to some extent the intellectual hunger of foreign readers.
2. It can be recognized as a good introduction of Zen to the West.
3. In view of the fact that few people can talk in English on Zen and translate Zen scriptures into English, this book is relatively successful. The exposition of Zen terms is not bad.

On the other hand, I found the following defects:

1. The origin of Zen is not satisfactorily explained.
2. The account of Zen’s historical development is too short.

3. The philosophical background is lacking.

The author has followed the age-old tradition of Japanese writers who avoid theoretical discourses. If the author had tried to speak on contemporary Zen, he would have had to refer to the theoretical basis of Zen.

4. The author has gone beyond the limits in giving his book the title of “Zen,” because he does not cover the whole area of Zen. He has omitted Soto Zen, the largest Zen group in Japan. He puts too much effort in the clarification of the scripture of the Zen to which he happens to belong.

5. A guide book for occidentals needs a more thorough understanding of Western ideas and thought.

6. The style may be welcomed by the “Beat” generation. This book is a pearl for them. But the

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abuse of Zen by such a group must be avoided.

7. The Chinese characters on the cover, 禪那 were used in the past to denote *Jhana*. But this transcription has been proved to be wrong. It is a rule to drop the final vowel in a Chinese transcription; so *jhana* must be *jhan*,

that is 禪 (*Zen*). Accordingly 禪那 means *jhanana*, which is ridiculous.

The fact that the author printed the age-long mistake on the cover shows not only his indifference to contemporary study, but also a lack of academic discipline.

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