

Joseph D. PARKER, *Zen Buddhist Landscape Arts of Early Muromachi Japan (1336-1573)*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999. 302 pp. \$74.50 cloth, ISBN 0-7914-3909-7. \$24.95 paper, ISBN 0-7914-3910-0.

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN religion and culture is endlessly fascinating, and as Buddhism in general and Zen in particular become more established in the Western world, studies of Zen-influenced forms of art gain in importance. Joseph D. Parker tackles one of the most unusual of these interactions, the Japanese *shigajiku* (poem-painting scrolls) which were created primarily at the "Five Mountain" monasteries during the early fourteenth century. While combinations of poetry and painting are common in East Asian art, *shigajiku* are significant in that the poems take precedence; the scroll surfaces are often covered primarily with calligraphy, while the painted section serves as only a small element in the total format.

Similarly, art history plays a relatively small role in this book, which focuses instead upon artistic activities, or more broadly cultural activities, within the context of East Asian religion during the period between 1000 and 1500. Parker focuses a good deal of the book on the question of whether time given to the arts, particularly poetry, was a distraction from Zen practice, or a legitimate expression of Zen values. In setting the stage for this discussion, he notes that despite the honor given in poetry to the ideal of escaping into the pure mountains and rivers, the Japanese masters that he deals with were hardly recluses. Instead, they were "highly social and greatly interested in current affairs of the day" (x).

What lies behind these questions of how much monks should take part in larger social issues is the fact that, in medieval Japan, Zen became what it had never been before: the major cultural force. While in China, Ch'an had functioned in part as an alternative, a "safety valve" for those dissatisfied with the prevailing worldview (which was structured primarily as a Confucian order of society). In Japan, however, Zen was taken up by governmental and cultural leaders to the extent that Zen masters became responsible for a great deal of the education, governmental advising, cultural endeavors, and even such matters as trade missions to China. In this context, there was certainly a perceived danger that Zen might be subverted to the interests of secular and

political society, and, further, that cultural attainments might become valued over religious ones. Parker states his position early in his book, asserting that “these Zen monks found the landscape arts to carry deep religious significance... [and] understood culture to be a valid mode for the production of religious value, just as they saw the Zen meditation hall as a place for the deepening of Buddhist insight” (3). This is in spite of the fact that monks sometimes admonished their pupils from becoming too literary; there was a clear dividing line between artistic practice as part of Zen activity and art for more mundane reasons. In this context, *shigajiku* emerged as a unique artistic effort, combining the work of a number of Zen monks who would each add a poem to accompany (or be accompanied by) a modest painting. Parker writes that the monks synthesized many aspects of Chinese culture, including the literati movement, “without losing their sense of Zen Buddhism as their home tradition” (3). To support this point, Parker devotes the first chapter to “The Chinese Religious and Cultural Context,” giving more emphasis here than is common in Japanese texts. He stresses the importance of such major literati as Su Shih (1037–1101), who himself had received a strong influence from Zen, but is generally considered as one of the major Neo-Confucian scholar-artists of the Sung Dynasty.

Chapter Two, “Japanese Five Mountains Zen and the Poem-and-Painting Scrolls” is the heart of the book. Here Parker offers biographies and commentary on the leading Zen masters of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, emphasizing their interactions with each other: “friendship was not a casual acquaintance but a process of understanding the mind of one’s fellow monks” (85). A number of *shigajiku* are reproduced in black-and-white and discussed in this chapter; Parker notes that in most cases the poetic inscriptions were written at various times, with the scroll passed from monk to monk until complete. The most common theme for both poems and paintings is landscape, sometimes with a sub-theme of friends parting from each other; frequently a scholar’s or monk’s villa or studio is shown, but not necessarily referred to in the inscriptions. From this point, about half-way through the book, Parker strikes out in further directions, with chapters on “The East Asian Religious Context for Cultural Practice,” “Zen Buddhist Readings of the Landscape: The Hermit at Court,” “Buddhist Illusion and the Landscape Arts,” and “Buddhist Playfulness and the Landscape Arts.” As can be ascertained from the chapter titles, his primary interest lies in the broad cultural-religious questions of how Buddhism and culture, and in particular Zen and art, interact. Supporting his view of the legitimacy of artistic practice as part of Zen life, Parker quotes the monk Gidō Shūshin (1325–1388): “Outside of the Way are not traces; other than traces there is no Way. Clouds and canyons! Poetry and painting! All are of my Way. Where is there any distance?” (131). Parker concludes that “the ideal expression of Zen Buddhism was found in the playful poetic, prose, and artistic expression in the midst of the samsaric world.” (132–33).

Because Parker has taken such a broad approach to his topic, there are various criticisms from different fields that could be made. As an art historian, for example, I would have hoped for more extended analysis of the *shiga-*

jiku scrolls themselves, including not only the paintings but also the calligraphy, and the unusual compositions in which they were combined. Similarly, religious and literary scholars might have preferred more specificity at times in the commentary both on Zen and on poetry. Nevertheless, Parker's approach is certainly appropriate for his topic, which combines religion and culture in a unique and fascinating way, and there can be no doubt that his thorough and thoughtful consideration of many historical and artistic factors helps to make clear the world of the *shigajiku* scrolls. The volume, which is generally sound in its scholarship, ends with a conclusion, epilogue, notes, glossary, selected bibliography, and an index.

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