

## REVIEWS

NAGAO Gadjin 長尾雅人 , *Bukkyō no genryū: Indo 仏教の源流—インド* [The Wellsprings of Buddhism: India]. Asahi Culture Books, No.39. Osaka: Osaka Shoseki, 1984. Paperbound. 232pp. ¥1,200.

Nagao Gadjin is a wizard. The masses of scriptural material as well as the varieties of historical development, cultural adaptation, folk tradition, research, controversy, and interpretation refined into this brief introduction to "the wellsprings of Buddhism" testify to a lifetime of scholarly pursuit. Its sturdy yet highly readable prose, sensitive both to the complexity of the subject matter and to the needs of a popular audience, show the subtle hand of a master artist too deeply in faith and love with what he writes about to intrude his own personality into the text. In his person Buddhism has nothing less than a living treasure.

The structure of the book is itself a pedagogical master stroke. The table of contents looks rather as we might expect: seven chapters beginning with a placing of Buddhism as a "religion" relative to other religions, passing on to an account of the story of the Buddha, the doctrinal paradigms that inform its mixture of fact and legend, and the personality of the Buddha that emerges as a result, and a treatment of the fundamental teaching of Buddhism with special attention to the notions of *sūnya* and *praṭītyasamutpāda* and to the meaning of the bodhisattva ideal. Within this framework Nagao leads—or rather, entices—the reader from the simple to the more complex, returning again and again to the material of the earlier chapters in order to preserve a sense of unity and purpose to the project.

Indirectly at first, but more and more clearly as the book progresses, we also see a still deeper motif directing his presentation: a guarded but unmistakable attempt to argue for the relevance, if not the superiority, of Yogācāra thought for appropriating Buddhist tradition into the contemporary world. Not only is it introduced as the high-water mark of the reformation that Māhāyana brought to Buddhism, but it seems to form the very philosophical ground for Nagao's own efforts to offer a hermeneutical structure within which the modern mind can read Buddhist doctrine, and yet within which it can be inspired to the higher wisdom that only comes with contemplative insight.

Doctrinally speaking, it is in his treatment of the core doctrines of interdependent origination and emptiness that his *Yogācāra* leanings come more to the fore. By the time the reader reaches the final lecture, it seems very much a matter of course that Nagao should conclude with a scriptural quotation from Hsüan-tsang's translation of the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, stressing the availability of enlightenment to all human beings within the immediacy of present life.

It is in the service of this wider motif, too, that Nagao's attempts to help the reader "see through" certain of the more fantastical elements of Buddhist tradition do not stop at mere demythifying but search out that inner meaning for which words in general, and the language of literal realism in particular, are clearly inadequate. This would also seem to be why he simply passes over other of these elements without apology, and why he is not unwilling to draw on models outside of the Buddhist world. In fact, he arranges his treatment of the life of the Buddha around the Western notion of the three-fold dialectical pattern of "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" (which he tells us he is taking from Hegel, though actually Hegel himself never used all three together in his own dialectic), in order to show how the events depicted there represent a symbolical quest for the middle way that subsumes the opposites and lifts them to a higher level of perfection. Conversely, many of Nagao's interpretations suggest interesting parallels for Christian exegesis; for example, his comments on the phrase *itton seppō* 一音說法 (which appears in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*, pp. 134-36) could be taken over just as it is to interpret the miracle of Pentecost recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

Given that the intended audience is Japanese, it stands to reason that examples should be chosen that will make clearest sense to his readers. In fact, there is nothing in the book that would not be equally transparent to non-Japanese able to read it in the original with two minor exceptions, trivial flaws in themselves that stand out only because of the great care with which the rest of the work is polished. In one context, Nagao twice makes reference to "foreign" scholarship to mean "Western" scholarship when the context requires that Japan be considered among the countries "foreign" to the origins of Buddhism (pp. 47, 48). Later on, in explaining the Japanese notion of *en*, *enishi* 縁 or *innen* 因縁 (words describing a sense of one's appointed fate or

ordained affinities), he recalls how hard he found it to communicate their meaning to Americans. After politely accusing his inadequate grasp of the English language, he then proceeds to insinuate that the real problem resides in the fact that the Japanese sense of being "matched" for marriage (and this is true even more so in "love marriages" than in "arranged" ones) grants them a privileged access to understanding *en* that is closed off to Westerners who meet, fall in love, and marry under their own control. The error is, of course, elementary. That it is so widespread in Japan stems as much from the failure of the West to understand the Orient as to the tendency of the Japanese to allow the images of the mass media to flatten out the vast landscape of meanings that history, literature, and religion have fed into human relationships in Western cultures, in order to insure their differentiation from things Japanese. The pity is that Nagao had to reconfirm that bias in his audience. (A few hours spent with George Duby's 1981 study, *Le chevalier, la femme, et le prêtre*, should suffice to make the point for Westerners who share that bias about themselves.)

If there is any problem of substance I have with Nagao's book, it lies less in what is said than in what is left unsaid. Scholars of Buddhism who are at the same time committed believers seem to have a problem with accounting for the "dark side" of their religious tradition, and as a result generally leave it out of account altogether. Yet at the same time, they are more than willing to draw attention to the oppression and misunderstanding they have suffered at the hands of other religions, particularly Christianity. The same is true of Nagao, who draws, for instance, on Christianity's history of active participation in warfare to provide a contrast with the "pacifism" of Buddhism, yet fails to say so much as a single critical word about Buddhism's deep history of complicity with injustice. Like all human institutions, religions cast shadows that follow them around wherever they go. Perhaps only for brief and fleeting moments in the noonday sun of its great saints and reformers can a religious tradition attain that pure, all-encompassing radiance in which there is no darkness. For the rest, it is only half-true to depict the ideal while forgetting the reality.

Although stripped of all but the immediately helpful scholarly apparatus (and brief comments in the final lecture on a few books recommended for supplementary reading), the same clarity of

expression and logical progression of thought that makes Nagao's professional academic work such a joy to read recommends this little book for a wide audience, but above all for those Japanese who have grown forgetful of the claims their deep Buddhist roots make on them. In his closing remarks he tells us that he had to do considerable rewriting to prepare the original lectures on which the book is based for publication. His decision to retain the grammatical forms of public address was a happy one; it both lightens the text and creates a mood of respect for its subject matter. I have no doubt that there are many who will find this book the ideal text for introducing the fundamental concerns of Buddhism. I for one intend to use it both with my undergraduates in religion and to make it required reading for my graduate students in theology.

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