Rosemary MERCER, trans. *Deep Words: Miura Baien's System of Natural Philosophy*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991. x+216 pp. Cloth $65.75; ISBN 90-04-09351-6.

This book consists of a brief introduction followed by three essays of Miura Baien (1723–1789) in translation: *Genkiron* 元熙論 [Treatise on primal *ki*], an early (1753) discussion of natural philosophy; the "core text" (*honsō* 本宗) chapters of *Gengo* 玄語 [Deep words], Baien's mature (1775) views on ideas first expressed in *Genkiron*; and *Taga Bokkei ni kotauru sho* 多賀墨卿にこたふる書 [A reply to Taga], a 1777 explication of *Gengo*. Within each translated essay, Mercer provides passage-specific and (sometimes) more general commentary after each related group of paragraphs. Following the translations are a few pages of biographical information consisting of translated excerpts from the work of Shimada Kenji.

Miura Baien, perhaps nineteenth-century Japan's most original thinker, wrote prolifically on such topics as astronomy, human physiology and medicine, epistemology, and metaphysics. In the book under review Mercer examines only Baien's philosophy of nature, which is a reasonable approach to delimiting the scope of her work. The choice of *Genkiron*, *Gengo honsō*, and *Taga Bokkei* enables the reader to see how key concepts in Baien's natural philosophy developed over time. Mercer enhances this strength via the commentary sections in which she points out passages particularly important for understanding the evolution of Baien's thought.

On the other hand, Baien's natural philosophy is presented in a near vacuum, without sustained analysis of his other work, the intellectual environment of late eighteenth-century Japan, or the three varieties of Chinese thought that Baien clearly drew most heavily upon: the thought of Chuang-tzu; Ch'eng-Chu Neo-Confucianism; and the more empirical, scientific

Confucianism of late-Ming/early-Ch'ing scholars such as Fang I-chih. It would, of course, be unreasonable to expect full coverage of any of these topics in view of the limited scope of the task Mercer set for herself. Nevertheless, we are told that "a major reward of the study of Baien's work is the light it sheds on Chinese thought, both classical and Neo-Confucian" (p. 3), and that "[my] second aim is to present a strong thesis about the nature of Baien's philosophical enterprise, and with this to suggest its place in the Sino-Japanese tradition" (p. 16).

With only a brief introduction and no concluding section, the commentary is Mercer's only vehicle for conveying this "strong thesis" and contextual placement of Baien's thought. To be sure, several important points recur throughout the commentary, for example, that Baien consistently refused to view the One Primal *Ki* (the *genki* of *Genkiron*) in mystical terms, and that he conceived of nature as existing independently, apart from human perception and thought. But Mercer does not analyze such ideas in comparison with those of other Japanese and Chinese thinkers. The commentary does, however, provide occasional comparisons of Baien's thought with certain European philosophers such as Plato, Aquinas, Hegel, and Copleston. Indeed, my impression from Mercer's *Deep Words* is that while she has clearly attained a high degree of knowledge of Baien's writings, she is nevertheless more familiar with European traditions of thought than with those of East Asia. Whatever the case, *Deep Words* does not satisfactorily place Baien's philosophical enterprise within Sino-Japanese intellectual traditions.

On the other hand, the author's apparent interest in European philosophy may have contributed to a more successful pursuit of her stated primary aim: "Profitable discussion of Miura Baien's system of natural philosophy cannot proceed in the Western world until key texts are available in English. It is the primary purpose of this book to provide such texts" (p. 16). While I would not necessarily agree that English translations are a prerequisite for profitable discussion of Baien's philosophy in the "Western world," clearly the major issue in evaluating *Deep Words* is the quality of the translations. For this purpose, I shall focus on the most important essay, *Gengo honsō*. It exists in numerous versions (Baien revised it repeatedly), and Mercer's translation is based on the classical Chinese text in the *Baien zenshū*. YAMADA Keiji has produced a widely available modern Japanese translation of *Gengo* (1982), and prior to hunting down the *Zenshū* text, I compared parts of Mercer's translation with that of Yamada. That the two differed significantly was immediately apparent, and my initial suspicion was that Mercer's translation was deficient. Comparison with the original, however, revealed that while Mercer has indeed made some errors, her rendition is generally a faithful, though very literal translation, which is true to her stated policy: "The primary aim dictates a translation policy in which close verbal match takes precedence over personal surmise and elegance of style" (p. 16).

Yamada, on the other hand, takes quite the opposite approach of a highly interpretive and explanatory translation, with the frequent addition of glosses to key terms incorporated into his main text. Closely following the original, Mercer nearly always assigns a single English term to each word in Baien's

philosophical lexicon (e.g. "object" for *mono*), which she then consistently uses throughout the translation. These English terms are little better than romanized versions of the original terms, since the reader must rely entirely on context and the separate commentary to fathom their meaning.

The opening passage of *Gengo* is a representative example of the different approaches to translation. Mercer's version reads as follows:

> Object has nature and nature is endowed with object. Nature and object merge without seams. Thus they are one whole. **Nature pairs with body, object pairs with *ki***. Nature and object stand distinct, this is *jōri*. Thus they are two sides. Nature is nature alongside object, object is object alongside nature. Therefore, one is one and one, and one and one is one. (p. 78)

With the exception of the portion in bold print, this translation is correct, and corresponds almost word-for-word with the original. Compare it with the following literal English rendering of Yamada in which the four key terms (*mono, sei, karada*, and *ki*) are left untranslated, and the explanation of mutual pairing is put in bold for comparison with the emphasized passage above:

> The ontological pattern *mono* possesses the ontological pattern *sei*; the ontological pattern *sei* is endowed with the ontological pattern *mono*. Viewed from this perspective, *sei* and *mono* merge with no seam between them. Therefore, that they are one is their state of being as a whole. **The ontological pattern *mono* forms a pair with the ontological pattern *karada*; the ontological pattern *sei* forms a pair with the ontological pattern *ki***. Based on this perspective, *mono* and *sei* become discrete, and *jōri* exists between them. Therefore, that they are two is their state of being as discrete entities. *Sei* is the *sei* with which *mono* is endowed; *mono* is the mono that possesses *sei*. Therefore, one (the whole) is in effect two (the two parts), and two is likewise one. (p. 329)

Mercer's literal translation forces the reader to struggle with the original terms, and the commentary provides uneven assistance in this struggle. The reader is freer to develop his own interpretation, but may also be less likely to feel any initial sense of comprehension. By comparison, the Yamada translation—with its additional interpretive buffer between Baien and the present-day reader—is much more accessible and comfortable, at least for those who read Japanese.

Because of the significant differences between these two approaches, the specialist in Japanese thought would profit from reading both *Deep Words* and Yamada's translations. Perhaps the major contribution of *Deep Words* is that it provides the student of comparative philosophy who does not read Japanese with a fighting chance of comprehending at least some of Miura Baien's intricate thought.

REFERENCE

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