

Hubert Durt, *Problems of Chronology and Eschatology: Four Lectures on the Essay on Buddhism by Tominaga Nakamoto (1715–1746)*. Italian School of East Asian Studies, Occasional Papers 4. Kyoto: ISEAS, 1994.

The present work, the fourth in ISEAS' series of shorter works on East Asian history and culture, is the published outcome of four lectures held by Hubert Durt in Kyoto in May and December 1992. The contributions to this series have an almost cameo quality and the apparent reconditeness of their topics generally belies their broader significance for questions of cultural import. Such is certainly the case with Durt's present contribution, which demonstrates the value of a life-time spent turning over the manifold—and to the outsider

often quaint—stones of traditions which have been part and parcel of East Asia’s intellectual and cultural life for centuries.

The book is also evidence of a growing interest in Japanese thought in the early modern period, and readers of this journal will immediately recall Michael Pye’s translation of Tominaga’s writings, *Emerging from Meditation*, reviewed in an earlier issue of *SCEAR*,¹ not least because the approach taken by Durt provides an interesting contrast and complement to Pye’s. The latter’s primary aim was to provide a translation which was capable of showing the modernity of Tominaga’s critical bent, Durt is more concerned with using his series of *essais* to place Tominaga in a more comprehensive historical, cultural and scholarly context. As such the most salient feature of the Belgian scholars work in contrast to Pye’s treatment is the manner in which the former’s long-term experience in dealing with the textual and intellectual history of Buddhism, including emic and etic aspects of Buddhist chronology, especially in that religion’s development in East Asia, come to the fore. The reader is thus treated to a veritable plethora of references to related items in the Buddhist canon which do much to reveal not only Tominaga’s intellectual context but also the extent and limits of his learning, both of which of course were not Pye’s primary concern. Importantly, too, Durt provides a different perspective at many individual points *passim* as well as correcting a number of errors in Pye’s reading of the text.² The two books together might thus be considered as being of interest for advanced undergraduate or elementary postgraduate teaching. Finally, it is also extremely pleasant to detect the original oral character of the essays at many points in this short work, a feature which those acquainted with the type of gathering, held in Kyoto with French-Italian regularity, will surely appreciate.

Together, the four essays presented in this short work provide the reader with that rare combination: a comprehensive survey combined with a wealth of enlightening detail. Following a short Introduction (pp. 1–4), in which he plots the course to be followed, Durt deals with “The Buddhist Scholarship of Tominaga” (pp. 5–22), “Chronology: The Date of the Buddha’s Appearance According to Tominaga” (pp. 23–40), “Eschatology: Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha and Degeneration of the Dharma” (pp. 41–56), and finally “The Long and Short Nirvāṇa Sūtras” (pp. 57–74). The valuable Bibliography (pp. 75–89) is divided into two sections, (A) Works and Collections Before 1850 and (B) Books, Collections and Journal Articles since 1850. The book is finished off

¹ Tominaga Nakamoto, *Emerging from Meditation*, tr. Michael Pye, London: Duckworth, 1990; cf. my review in *SCEAR* 5/6 (1992–3), pp. 198–204, which also contains references to other relevant works.

² Cf., for example, p. 19, n. 25, where Durt draws attention to Pye’s confusion of the *prajñāpāramitā*- and the *parinirvāṇasūtras*. One assumes that the chronologies of the respective projects were not fortunate enough to be synchronized, given that Durt is accorded pride of place in Pye’s Acknowledgements!

with a useful Index (pp. 91–8).

In the first chapter, Durt deals with the general character and contents of the *Shutsujōkōgo*, pointing out, in addition to the obvious scholarly qualities possessed by Tominaga, the sense of humour and irony which accompany—indeed which may be seen as a consequence of—his historical approach. Apart from the practical use of Durt’s summary of Tominaga’s work, this chapter’s value lies in its pointing out less obvious literary characteristics as well as such determining factors as those listed on page 10: Tominaga’s broad knowledge of the Buddhist canon, his lack of sectarian prejudice (rare indeed!), a distrust of the scholastic tradition on the grounds of its *a posteriori* justifications, and his keen attention to any chronological information in the Buddhist sources (although Durt is also keen to point out (p. 11) that Tominaga was not wholly sound in his historical reasoning). Durt also has a keen sense of the distinction between such historical reasoning and an if not a perfect, then a more or less adequate historical knowledge such as that enjoyed by Burnouf a century later, and uses this to point out the true achievement of Tominaga as lying in “the dynamics of his radical criticism and consequently the variety of his intuitions” (rather than simply looking at his methods and conclusions). Also very useful in this first chapter are what amount to notes on the terms used by Tominaga, which serve as useful stimuli for anyone approaching the original text. Here again, Durt provides a useful complement to Pye’s translation, which for the reasons already mentioned, does not furnish the reader with the same degree of contextualization in Buddhist canonical terminology.

The second chapter, on chronology, draws very much on the excellent work already done by Durt on the date of the Buddha.³ Also welcome in this part of the book are references to aspects of East Asian chronology which fall outside the narrow confines of a merely Buddhist perspective, such as the elucidation of the significance of the reigns of Chinese kings (pp. 25f) or the treatment of the historical and classical sources (pp. 37ff). In general, there is much on the relevance of Chinese Buddhist habits here which contributes greatly to the rounded picture of Tominaga’s scholarship and personality that emerges in the book. Durt’s conclusion to the chapter is as surprising as it is impressive: “Tominaga’s essay on Buddhism retains considerable value as a historical document. It stands as a monument to a bold (albeit sometimes poorly informed) philological approach and to the spirit of a man who attempted to make a rational interpretation of history” (p. 40).

The penultimate chapter takes eschatology as its central theme, focussing on two of the shorter Nirvāṇa sūtras, the *Sūtra of Mahāmāya* (T. 383) and the *Sūtra*

³ See the detailed contributions to the collection, *The Dating of the Historical Buddha*, Vol. 1, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991, edited by Heinz Bechert: “La date du Buddha en Corée et au Japon” (pp. 458–85) and “The Two Different Dates for the Life of the Buddha According to the Dotted Record” (pp. 486–9).

of the *Annihilation of the Law* (T. 396). In addition to his predominantly philological approach, Durt also brings in here for the first time objects of art as an essential part of the various expressions of the theme of *mappō* in East Asian Buddhism (it is also for this reason that the cover bears a reproduction of the central part of the Shaka konkan shutsugenzu, “Śākyamuni Rising from the Golden Coffin”, a Heian painting held by the National Museum, Kyoto).

After a brief resume of the character and significance of the idea of *mappō*, Durt proceeds to detail the progress of Tominaga’s arguments, pausing on occasion to draw attention to the latter’s witty treatment of some of the historical inconsistencies produced by the idea. For instance, in his account of the suggestion that Bodhidharma went east because Buddhism was in decline in India, Durt remarks with Tominagan dryness, “Tominaga himself does not seem to be convinced that a decaying doctrine will be revived by travelling to another country. He derides the Zen people for making Bodhidharma a rival of Śākyamuni and is convinced that Bodhidharma is the most pitiful man on earth” (p. 44). However, it is probably in his handling of the scriptural background to Tominaga’s treatment of eschatology that the strengths of Durt’s approach in this chapter emerge, not least because he weaves the artistic traditions of the *parinirvāṇa* into his otherwise philological and text-critical account. In his conclusion to the chapter, Durt makes the very valuable identification of Tominaga’s actual purpose in dealing with eschatology, namely not the degeneration of the *buddhadharma* itself, but the fact that he perceives the Buddhist canon simply as a series of accretions (*kajō*),⁴ neither good nor bad in themselves: “What he deplores is the a-historical or the pseudo-historical judgement of the Buddhist scholarly tradition concerning that evolution” (p. 56).

The final chapter, actually the first one to be presented publicly, deals with the *Nirvāṇa* literature, more specifically the long and the short *Nirvāṇa sūtras*. Here, Durt not only expands the scope of his textual material to include the *Nirvāṇa* literature as a corpus (without suggesting that it is in any way wholly consistent about the final events in the life of the Buddha) to include *vinaya* regulations on death and funerals and the ritual prescriptions included there, as well as the importance of artistic representations and popular traditions. This chapter, which of the four is the least rounded, ending as it does rather abruptly, leaving the reader wondering a little what purpose the detailed listing of the relevant canonical and apocryphal texts might be, serves mainly to emphasise the breadth of Tominaga’s erudition and thus “encourage us to study the *Nirvāṇa* literature as a whole” (p. 74). It is perhaps the circumstance of this chapter’s having been delivered in a different context to the other three (which were given together, as an independent series) that leaves the reader

⁴ It should be noted that here, as elsewhere generally, Durt adopts Pye’s terminology, which makes for a welcome degree of consistency.

hanging a little and wishing for a more detailed summary of Durt's perception of Tominaga's achievements and continuing value. Despite this drawback, the reader will still find himself picking up this little book time and again, thumbing backwards and forwards, finding something new, enjoyable and useful each time.

Ian Astley

Eastern Canons: Approaches to the Asian Classics. Edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990 (pbk., 1995).

Among the numerous publications in the Columbia Asian Studies Series, we find, in the Companions Series, two books of great value for introductory and comparative approaches to the written sources of Asian cultures: Amy Vladeck Heinrich's *A Guide to Oriental Classics* (3rd ed., 1989) and Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom's *Approaches to the Asian Classics* (1990). Both works have recently been reissued in expanded, systematized, and updated forms. Heinrich's edition replaces the *Guide* of 1964, edited by de Bary and Ainslee T. Embree, and presents comprehensive and updated bibliographies on the individual classics and proposes topics for classroom discussions of these, while the *Approaches to Oriental Classics*, first published in 1959 and edited by de Bary, has come out in a modernized form (suggested by the substitution of "Asian" for the now somewhat outdated and even somewhat controversial "Oriental" in the title), leaving out some of the now less relevant contributions concerning the significance of Asian classics in the American university education of the fifties and sixties. The new *Approaches* reproduces a few of the essays originally published in the 1959 edition, but the greater part of the collection constitutes essays which—in the light of more recent research—either re-examine individual classics presented in the first edition or offer approaches to classics not treated therein.

Classics of four major Asian traditions, the Islamic, the Indian, the Chinese, and the Japanese, are, again, introduced by leading scholarly experts of Asian studies in America (at Columbia especially). As stated in the Preface, the essays are "aimed at the non-specialist", and the classics presented are not necessarily the most obvious and famous ones, but often classic works less accessible to the general reader have been selected. The intention is to introduce in brief essays classics representative of their cultural tradition to a broader readership, and therefore the contributors "have not striven for originality of interpretation, . . . but rather for what is most central and commonly understood about these works in their own tradition, what it is that has made them classics by general consensus over the centuries, and what it is that can still speak to us most directly today" (p. xi). To these remarks on the principles for selection in this volume, de Bary, in his well set-out article

on “Asian Classics as ‘Great Books of the East’”, adds: “instead ... of looking for ‘Eastern’ equivalents of Western classics, we were looking for what each of the several Asian traditions honoured themselves as an essential part of their heritage” (p. 42). Although most “classics” indisputably are found in religious traditions, the Asian canons, therefore, cannot be taken to constitute only Sacred Books of the East. Classic works of the literary and intellectual traditions must be canonized too in order to paint a fuller picture of the Asian civilizations’ “distinctive aesthetic and intellectual qualities” (p. 43), and to support a more complete understanding of the religious canons. It is, however, as de Bary carefully points out, important to keep in mind that any Western collection or reading list of “Eastern canons”, as evidenced by the present volume, is a synthetic construction (p. 42).

The inclusion in this volume of descriptive and interpretative essays of diverse religious works, epics, poetry, autobiographies, and histories of four major Asian traditions, covering a period of some three thousand years, does, I believe, provide the target readership not only with balanced consensus understandings of specific classics, but with general surveys of the distinctive cultural traditions as intended by the editors as well—works of all categories (with overlaps) from each tradition are presented. To the comparativist student or teacher to whom these works and traditions are little known, however, the editors’ decision to leave out several of the most central classic works of those traditions is less fortunate. And the lack of uniformity in the presentations of the separate works forms a further, major obstacle to any new student who stresses the comparative approach. It may be unavoidable in a collective volume of this kind, but, certainly, its aiming both at students, who are in need of concise descriptive information about the texts, their historical, specific contextual, intertextual, and textual backgrounds, *and* at teachers is at times problematic. Some of the essays imply previous knowledge of the text and its background, and place more emphasis on discussing the approach which a Western reader (teachers especially) should take to an analysis of the text. Muhsin Mahdi’s essay on the historical *Prolegomena* (*Muqqadimah*) of Ibn Khaldūn demonstrates this problem. Mahdi’s essay attempts “to indicate some of the didactic problems faced in teaching this work on the undergraduate level, both in general courses on Islamic civilization and as a great book of a non-Western civilization” (pp. 98–9). Although the essay does contain basic information about the central themes of the *Prolegomena* (e.g. Ibn Khaldūn vs. Islamic dominant traditionalist thought, the conflict of religious-legal sciences and philosophic-rational sciences), most words are spent on warnings of incompetent Western readings, the problem of the apparent modernity of the text, etc. The non-specialist reader is not provided with much background information, such as the dates of the author, or any biographical data, the date of the completion of the text, the title of the full work (*Kitāb al-’Ibar*), or any summary of its contents (to replace the previously published ones in the West which Mahdi finds to be distorted and defective).

The reader with no previous knowledge of Ibn Khaldūn and his work must go elsewhere to obtain the basic textual and essential background information before reading Mahdi's—otherwise very inspiring—essay.

In other contributions of the volume, we do, however, find examples of a more fortunate combination of basic information for the new student and useful advice for the teacher. The article on *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*) by Haruo Shirane is exemplary in this respect: almost every piece of information necessary for a smooth and pleasant first (secondary) encounter with this great historical novel is provided (author, dating, title, summary of contents, style, effects, key themes, literary-historical significance, etc.), and, at the same time, one or two tips for the teacher of undergraduates are given. The main emphasis in this essay is—as expected—placed on description and interpretation of the classic.

Approaches contains several fine essays on famous autobiography-styled or diary-like works: Abū Hāmid Al-Ghazālī's didactic *Al-munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (The Deliverance (or Deliverer?) from Error) is introduced by Peter J. Awn, Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* by Ainslee T. Embree, and Kamo no Chōmei's diary-essay *Hōjōki* (An Account of My Hut) by Paul Anderer. While the latter two contain almost all the authorship and intertextual information one can expect to find in short presentations, the lack of reference in Awn's article to al-Ghazālī's other well known literary products, e.g. his major work *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), is a little surprising—and certainly does not promote a fuller understanding of the *Munqidh*. Awn's article does, however, teem with appropriate (in a presentation of an “autobiography”) author-biographical information based on internal and external evidence.

Co-editor Irene Bloom's introduction to the philosophical work of Mencius, Wing-tsit Chan's description of the *Lotus Sūtra* (including a full chapter-by-chapter summary of the text), C. T. Hsia's essay on the voluminous *Honglou meng* (A Dream of Red Mansions), H. Paul Varley's essay on *The Tale of the Heike*, Donald Keene's “Kenkō: Essays in Idleness (Tsuzuregusa)”, and Barbara Stoler Miller's account of Kālidāsa's magnificent heroic drama *Śakuntalā* all serve readers who do not possess any—or only little—previous knowledge of the texts presented. James Winston Morris' introduction to Farīd Al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* (The Conference of the Birds) is very enlightening, but, again, one wonders why 'Aṭṭār's other works like the *Ilāhī-nāmah* (Divine Book) and the *Muṣībat-nāmah* (Book of Affliction), which also treat the recurrent themes of pantheism, the realization of God with the human soul, and knowledge of one's self as God and everything, are left unmentioned, and why such essential information as dating is not given. Other contributors display great initiative in, for instance, giving citations in transcription of the original language (Haruo Shirane on the poetry of Matsuo Bashō), in bringing data concerning original manuscript versions and publication history (e.g. Philip Yampolsky on the *Platform Sūtra of the*

Sixth Patriarch), and in the inclusion of a discussion of cross-cultural parallels (e.g. Robert Antoine on Indian and Greek Epics).

Approaches to the Asian Classics prominently demonstrates the in- controvertibly great value of including the study of diverse Asian classics in broader studies of culture and classics, general courses on the theory of science, the history of literature, philosophy, and religion, offered at universities in non-Asian countries. Its twenty-odd essays on individual classic works may prove very useful and inspiring to most non-specialist students, teachers, and more generally interested readers. For seekers of exact lexical entrees to the texts and comprehensive introductions of their background situations, *Approaches* is—in general—hardly the first place to look. Comparativists may find it extremely useful to read all the essays gathered in this book and find it very illuminating to see expert reviews of great books of some of the greatest civilizations in the documented history of mankind, but the above-mentioned deficiencies, plus the lack of indices, make *Approaches* a less usable and user-friendly book to such readers.

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