

## BOOK REVIEWS

***Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism.* By Judith Simmer-Brown. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001. xxv, 404 pages. Hardcover, \$29.95; paperback (2002), \$18.95.**

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In *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism*, Judith Simmer-Brown explores many aspects of one of the more compelling, complex, and misunderstood figures of Tibetan Buddhism—that compassionate, fierce, powerful, and transforming group of female wisdom energy beings known as *dākinī*-s. Simmer-Brown takes her title from the fact that *dzogchen* is a “whispered tradition” with instruction transmitted via the breath in the whispering voice of the teacher. The *dākinī*'s warm breath implies a quality of intimacy, the closeness to be able to hear the whisper, to feel the warmth, and the essential juicy truth of the teaching. To understand the *dākinī* is to understand the deepest wisdom of the *dzogchen* tradition in this intimate way, for according to Simmer-Brown, the *dākinī* represents “the inner wisdom mind” of the tantric practitioner. In this tradition, “every word of Vajrayāna is the *dākinī*'s breath” (p. 290) and it is a gift of the tradition's innermost wisdom.

By introducing the student to the *dakini*, the guru is introducing his or her own realization and the treasury of the lineage's realization as no different from the student's (p. 96).

Simmer-Brown characterizes her methodology as “wildly messy,” taking her information from a wide variety of sources: oral teachings, personal practice, hagiographic literature, sutras, *tantras*, *sādhana*s, commentary, history, interviews, and conversations. She is also influenced by academic studies of gendered symbols in various religious traditions, which inform her understanding of patterns and meaning in *dākinī* lore. This eclectic approach combines to make *Dakini's Warm Breath* an interestingly readable and rich piece of scholarship. The *dākinī*-s that inspire her work personify:

. . . the spiritual process of surrendering expectation and concept, revealing limitless space and pristine awareness. While her feminine face drew me inward, what I have found is far beyond gender concerns. She is a powerful religious phenomenon, a fertile symbol of the heart of wisdom to be realized personally by every practitioner and to be respected and revered throughout the Tibetan tantric tradition. Her manifestations and meaning are profound, experiential, and hidden from rational strategy. Yet she appears everywhere in tantric literature and practice, mystifying and intriguing all tantric practitioners (pp. xv–xvi).

This study of *ḍākinī*-s in their myriad symbolic and human dimensions sheds much needed light on *ḍākinī* identity, power, and significance. Because *ḍākinī*-s are metamorphic, shape-shifting, mood-shifting, taboo-breaking beings, understanding them can help bring new perspectives to the study of gender and the role of psychosexual dynamics in spiritual development. *Ḍākinī*-s embody qualities that defy conventional stereotypes about the proper qualities and functions of women. *Ḍākinī*-s come in a variety of shapes and sizes: Prajñāpāramitā or Yum Chenmo, the Mother of All the Buddhas, along with being a text is also a deity, is a *ḍākinī*; Tārā in her twenty-one forms and her retinue, all *ḍākinī*-s; Ekadzati, the one-eyed, one-breasted protector of the *dzogchen* tradition is a *ḍākinī*; Vajrayoginī, the Queen of the *ḍākinī*-s, naked except for a few ornaments and surrounded by flames, is a *ḍākinī*. Animal-headed, human-bodied beings such as the cow-faced Vajravarahi and the lion-headed Simhamukha are *ḍākinī*-s. Historical women, realized practitioners such as Princess Maṅḍārāva, Yeshe Tsogyal, and Machig Labdron—*ḍākinī*-s all. *Ḍākinī*-s can still the mind in its everyday busyness for they can facilitate moving us beyond concepts in open awareness.

Simmer-Brown explains four levels in which *ḍākinī*-s exist: the secret *ḍākinī* which she calls “the great mother” *ḍākinī*; the inner *ḍākinī* or “visionary queen”; the outer *ḍākinī* as the “body of bliss”; and the outer-outer *ḍākinī*, that is, the human *ḍākinī*.

### The Secret *Ḍākinī*

In Vajrayana the Mother is said to be powerful because of her unique abilities to express the vast, awesome, limitless and (genderless) nature of emptiness. And the dakinis are transmitters of the radical realization of emptiness in all levels of manifestation (p. 115).

A reported conversation between Machig Labdron (the great saint, teacher, and founder of the Chod lineage) and Tārā illustrates the qualities

of the secret *ḍākinī* who is the primordial mother Prajñāpāramitā/Kuntuzangmo.

She is the ultimate nature of all phenomena, emptiness, the essence of reality [*dharmatā*] free from the two veils. She is the pure expanse of emptiness, the knowledge of the non-self, the matrix that gives birth to all the buddhas of the three times (p. 83).

While this principle is spoken of as feminine / mother / *yum* in the Tibetan tradition, Simmer-Brown points out that this principle is simultaneously gender-inclusive (both male and female) and beyond gender, so as to be in some ways intersexual and transgendered as well as asexual. *Ḍākinī*-s are also inter-species, in their combined animal and human forms. Simmer-Brown clarifies that this feminine principle is not to be confused with the mother goddess or the matriarchal traditions that prevail in other South Asian traditions, where a figure such as Kālī is associated with fecundity and materiality. The secret *ḍākinī*, primordial wisdom-mother in Tibetan Buddhism, is “associated with emptiness (*sunyata*) and the wisdom that sees the fundamental truth of how things really are” (p. 84). Milarepa says, “I’ve realized that just as mere knowledge of food doesn’t help a hungry man, it’s not enough to understand the goal of emptiness (intellectually); one must cultivate (its direct experience) repeatedly” (p. 89). *Ḍākinī*-s are most expedient allies in cultivating realization. In this way, the secret *ḍākinī* is the realized primordial wisdom-mind of the practitioner, whether that practitioner is male or female. In many ways the *ḍākinī* is the path, the goal, and the fruit simultaneously.

### The Inner *Ḍākinī*

Simmer-Brown describes the inner *ḍākinī* in the context of the *maṇḍala*: as beings who help practitioners overcome obstacles, and as protectors and presences in a world system where they play a very dynamic part. Simmer-Brown refers to the *maṇḍala* as the “complete environment of the universe as it is, physically, psychologically, and spiritually for the practitioner who has been introduced to wakefulness” (p. 117).

The inner *ḍākinī* is a visionary who rids us of mental fictions and facilitates spiritual transformation. Through meditation, dreams, and visions, the inner *ḍākinī* can open practitioners to the sacredness of all aspects of life. In classical art she is often naked except for a few ornaments. She wears a necklace of skulls, holds a skull cup brimming with blood in one hand, and a double-edged knife in the other. She appears with her right leg raised and appears to be dancing, ready to jump into action, crushing a corpse under her foot. Simmer-Brown explains her as the *ḍākinī* who:

... gazes into unfathomable space, and her body itself is luminous, empty of solidity. She embodies the teachings of emptiness in a uniquely Vajrayana way: she is the manifestation of coemergent wisdom, the all-inclusive wisdom generated in meditation. She captures the totality of the practitioner's mind, bringing both poles of attraction and revulsion directly to the path of realization. She cannot be conceptualized or categorized. She stops the mind (p. 132).

She is the *ḍākinī* of the charnel ground who, as a witness to death and decay, embodies the transformational truth of meditations on impermanence. Where much of our thinking around human behavior at such horrific sites tends to be of the "fight or flight" school, *ḍākinī*-s are of the "tend and befriend" school. According to tantric lore many *ḍākinī*-s were born in the charnel ground or reared there. Simmer-Brown tells the story of Kalasiddhi, a female infant who was left at the charnel ground with the mother who had died giving birth to her, as was the custom when women died in childbirth where the issue was a female child. The *yoginī* Maṇḍāravā, disguised as a tiger, found this child suckling at her dead mother's breast, and gave her to suckle her own tiger's breast milk. Feeding herself and the infant off of the dead mother's corpse, the child grew, became a weaver, was initiated into the *maṇḍala* of Vajrasattva, and became a *ḍākinī* herself.

Charnel grounds are seen as powerful places of Vajrayāna practice because the practitioner may use them to transform terror and fear of death into awakening. Simmer-Brown cites Padampa Sangye, Machik Labdron's mentor, as saying, "At first, to be fully convinced of impermanence makes you take up the dharma, in the middle, it whips up your diligence, and in the end it brings you to the radiant dharmakaya" (p. 124). In Vajrayāna practice, when the practitioner stays present and maintains discipline through fear and terror, releasing self-cherishing, it is then that Simmer-Brown says that the inner *ḍākinī* is at work providing nourishment and support. The inner *ḍākinī* is a symbol of transmuting pain and fear. Simmer-Brown points out that coemergent wisdom that arises out of the activity and experience of the inner *ḍākinī* is the great bliss of collapsed dichotomies. This wisdom is inner, inherent in each of us, the natural quality of nondual awareness.

### The Outer *Ḍākinī*

The outer *ḍākinī* manifests subtly, energetically in the physical bodies of real live, flesh and bones, men and women. Tibetan Buddhist views of the body and embodiment differ in significant ways from those currently circulating in biology, medicine, social science, theology, and feminist thought in the West. Simmer-Brown explains the view of the human body

as a *maṇḍala* of winds, channels, drops, and *cakras* of the subtle body that animate our grosser form. At each power point in the body, *ḍākinī*-s are at work. She says that “spiritual seeking fully engages bodily experience” (p. 162). The author discusses aspects of yoga and yogic practice where the *ḍākinī*-s manifest with an acknowledgment of the particularity of relationship of women to *ḍākinī*-s.

### The Outer-Outer *Ḍākinī*

In her discussion of the outer-outer *ḍākinī*-s, that is, human *ḍākinī*-s, Simmer-Brown shows the *ḍākinī* in ordinary lives and takes the opportunity to explore some of the more controversial and perplexing questions of human embodiment. How do we liberate desire and turn its intelligence and intensity toward awakening for ourselves and others? She cites the *Hevajatantra*, “that by which the world is bound, by that same its bonds are released” (p. 213). The *tantra* takes the Buddha’s realization of the truth of desire, aversion, and delusion as causes of our malaise and says that the key to liberation is contemplating, understanding, and working with these very factors, rather than running away from or banishing them. All is fodder for practice, including sexuality. *Ḍākinī*-s, on all levels, including the human, have the ability to accelerate the removal of obstacles through many methods including sexual yoga.

### Summary

Simmer-Brown tells the *ḍākinī* story partly through the lens of her own experience as a woman who has weathered gender inequities in academia and appreciates some of the opportunities that feminist activism and scholarship have opened up for women. She includes a critique of some psychological and gender-biased interpretations of *ḍākinī* lore that have perpetuated misunderstanding. For example, Jung’s theory of the contrasexual animus/ anima is often treated simplistically as a dichotomy of all gendered symbols, making any female representation symbolic of all qualities socially stereotyped as “feminine.” If one were to interpret the *ḍākinī* in terms of this dichotomy (as has been done for example by Herbert Guenther), such an interpretation would miss the complexity of the nondual principle which Simmer-Brown asserts is the core meaning of the *ḍākinī*.

Feminist critiques of *ḍākinī* lore point to the fact that what we know of *ḍākinī*-s is largely from the male point of view as the *ḍākinī*-s serve male deities and practitioners. The *yab-yum* (father-mother) iconography of sexual coupling found in Tibetan art, to the best of my knowledge, is exclusively heterosexual and in these sacred unions we never see the face of the female. Her back is always towards the viewer. This Tibetan Buddhist equivalent of the “missionary position” begs the question to the

contemporary observer—for a tradition that theoretically goes through and beyond the limitations of our gendered human bodies, that realizes that ultimately we are neither male or female, when it comes to enlightened energies, which both Prajñāpāramitā and Tārā symbolize, how is it that we never see sacred art expressing their union? Who has ever heard of the *sādhana* where practitioners are taught to visualize the “nectar” of their sacred union pouring over them? While Simmer-Brown does not really address or answer that question in her work, she indicates an important direction for further research and scholarship.

What remains to be done is a serious application of the tantric principles of heruka and wisdom dakini to homosexual identity and relationship, and to the study of embodiment (p. 289).

To that I would add the need for study as to the application of these principles for other expressions of sacred sexuality transgendered, intersexual, bisexual, and asexual identity and relationship as well. Little is known about who and how the *ḍākinī*-s are unto themselves, among other *ḍākinī*-s, and for female yoginis. Stories abound about the fabulous “*ḍākinī* feasts” where they gather amongst themselves in raucous and joyful revelry, indicating some kind of *ḍākinī* sisterhood. But these proceedings are shrouded in secrecy as *ḍākinī*-s are said to speak their own special language that the uninitiated are unable to fathom. For a philosophical and practical framework that sees our primordial ground of being as one of vast open space, one can imagine that there might be room for honoring the sacredness of myriad forms of sexual expression.

Simmer-Brown is sensitive to the fact that while Western scholars and practitioners have been intrigued, perhaps even titillated, by the *ḍākinī* phenomena, the holders of the Tibetan lineages have become very protective of the *ḍākinī*-s. These sky-going, space-traveling women are, in a way, the holy of holies of this tradition.

The dakini lore is one of the most revered and guarded of Tibetan esoteric symbolic teachings. Many diaspora Tibetan lamas have become concerned about interpretations they have encountered among Western observers, especially on topics as vulnerable to feminist scrutiny as the dakini and related understandings of sexuality. These lamas have seen their most sacred understandings interpreted through the lens of feminist critique in destructive ways that they feel denigrate the lama, the profound practices, and the effectiveness of teaching environments in the West (p. xviii).

That question persists of how we can respect a tradition, revere it even to the points of practice and realization, yet still keep our critical wits about

us to raise questions when we are disturbed by aspects of authority, hierarchy, and secrecy that have been problematic.

Given the powerful *ḍākinī* tradition that Simmer-Brown elucidates, how and why is it that we have or know so little about any lineages of female teachers? Women are recognized as having full spiritual potential in the Buddhist traditions, yet they have often been barred from leadership positions in institutional life. We are told “the dharma is neither male nor female,” and “there are no women in the Sukhāvātī heaven.” Buddhist tradition is rife with stories of women who are on the verge of enlightenment, who, if they practice seriously enough to come back in a male body, will achieve enlightenment in the next life. And, there is that privileging of scholars that Anne Klein speaks of in her experience that has given some Western women access to teachers and teaching that would rarely happen for women indigenous to the culture.

Until 1993, I had never met a female Tibetan teacher. All my Tibetan or other Asian teachers were male. My own position whether staying in a Tibetan monastery in India or engaging in discussions with monk-scholars in this country, was anomalous insofar as I had the kind of access to study, instruction, and personal interaction that only males would traditionally have in Tibetan culture. To be a scholar in a monastery is a male role, no matter what kind of body is involved (Anne C. Klein, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1995], p. 19).

The religious and cultural cross-fertilization that has happened in the last fifty years when the lamas of the Tibetan diaspora have brought the *dzogchen* teachings to the West has been an enriching one indeed. We begin to know one another. *Dakini's Warm Breath* has earned the highest ranking among publications by Western women writers in the last decade, such as Anne Klein's *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen*, Tsultrim Allione's *Women of Wisdom*, Miranda Shaw's *Passionate Enlightenment*, and June Campbell's *Travelers in Space*, that have described and interpreted aspects of *ḍākinī* life and literature, and have explored the ramifications of this phenomena for that distinctively human project of spiritual development and identity.

***The Dzogchen Primer: Embracing the Spiritual Path According to the Great Perfection.* Compiled and edited by Marcia Binder Schmidt. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2002, xvii, 310 pages. Paperback: \$17.95.**

### **Randall Studstill**

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As the Western fascination with Tibetan Buddhism continues to grow, one Tibetan Buddhist movement seems to be attracting special attention: the "Great Perfection," or *dzogchen* (also transliterated as "rDzogs-chen" and "Dzokchen"). Many Tibetan Buddhist teachers (Nyingmapas in particular, but also the current Dalai Lama, a Gelugpa) consider *dzogchen* the ultimate, most advanced form of Buddhist practice. Though the tradition is complex, encompassing a variety of movements and trends, most of its forms tend to emphasize a few, basic themes. At the level of view, for example, *dzogchen* teachers often insist that one is primordially pure from the very beginning. At the level of path, they claim that the highest practice is "doing nothing" or "letting be."

Buddhism, in its more traditional forms, is a renouncer tradition, and like other renouncer traditions, practicing it involves a good deal of inconvenience; most forms of Buddhist practice are not comfortable (see Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche's comments on p. 132). For Westerners interested in Tibetan Buddhism, the discomfort is compounded by the cultural foreignness of its symbols and rituals, the nondemocratic, non-egalitarian ideal of guru devotion, a pantheon of "deities" (some of which appear quite hideous), and a traditional cosmology replete with hell realms and hungry ghosts. Given these aspects of the tradition, a Western attraction to *dzogchen* is understandable. Without having to do anything (it appears) and without having to be involved with all those uncomfortable, somewhat embarrassing practices, rituals, and doctrines, one's self-image gets to glow in the satisfaction of being a practitioner of the "highest" form of Buddhism.

This approach to *dzogchen*, however, is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the tradition. *Dzogchen* is not practiced in a vacuum, but always engaged within the larger context of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. As practiced, *dzogchen* is never "just *dzogchen*." In a traditional setting, being introduced to *dzogchen* is the culmination of years of involvement with more conventional Buddhist views and practices. Neither is *dzogchen*, once introduced, intended to negate these traditional practices. Until Buddhahood, continued reflection on "the basics" (unsatisfactoriness, non-self, compassion, etc.) is almost always considered essential. To think otherwise is a form of self-delusion. As Tulku



Urgyen Rinpoche remarks, “One can fool oneself into believing one need only remain in simplicity. What this honestly means, though, is that such a person will have no spiritual progress” (p. 59).

This situation sets up ironic criteria for evaluating books about *dzogchen*. Presentations of *dzogchen* as a distinct tradition or movement may be valuable as scholarly projects and useful for the practitioner who already appreciates its history and traditional setting. But for a general, popular audience, or for those with limited background in the tradition, a book just about *dzogchen* can be highly misleading and promote the kind of misappropriation of the tradition described above. Depending on the audience, the best book about *dzogchen* is less about *dzogchen* than it is about the fundamentals of Buddhist views and practice considered by Tibetan Buddhists to be (1) the essential preliminary to *dzogchen* and (2) the ongoing context of *dzogchen* practice itself.

Based on these criteria, Marcia Binder Schmidt’s (ed.) *The Dzogchen Primer: Embracing the Spiritual Path According to the Great Perfection* is an important and welcome contribution to the popular literature about *dzogchen*. In spite of its title, the book has apparently little to do with *dzogchen*. And this is its strength. For all those who think *dzogchen* is hip and cool (and best of all, easy), *The Dzogchen Primer* is an invaluable dose of reality: a persistent and urgent reminder that until one has mastered the fundamentals of Buddhist views and practice, *dzogchen* can not be appreciated or practiced (see, for example, pp. 102, 104–5, 125–6, 175). If there is any one message of the book as a whole, it is this: *You must do (and keep doing) the preliminaries!*

The book is an anthology of Buddhist materials—the first volume of what will eventually be a three-volume series about *dzogchen* (presumably the next two volumes will focus more explicitly on *dzogchen*). Two types of materials make up the anthology: selections from classic Buddhist sources (Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, for example) and excerpts from books or lectures by modern Tibetan teachers (e.g., Chögyam Trungpa, Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, and Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche). Most of the selections are well-chosen. The materials by modern Buddhist teachers convey Buddhist concepts in a comprehensible, informal, and often engaging style. At the same time, the reader is exposed to important primary sources, made more meaningful and accessible in relation to modern presentations. The selections are grouped by theme and arranged according to Tibetan Buddhist soteriological theory; doctrines and practices considered to be the foundation of the path are presented first, followed by progressively more advanced teachings. Schmidt’s organization specifically follows the approach of Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, which is in turn based on the Tibetan classic, *The Light of Wisdom* (*Lamrim Yeshe Nyingpo*, traditionally ascribed to Padmasambhava). The book’s organization is also

inspired by Gampopa's *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. (The editor presents the book as a "user-friendly" distillation of the teachings contained in both sources.) This traditional, hierarchical arrangement of teachings is not meant to imply the inferiority of the preliminaries compared to later, more advanced practices. As one develops spiritually, new teachings are incorporated into one's practice without abandoning the foundational views and practices, which are considered essential at every stage of the path.

The book begins with a preface by the editor and (in part 1) two introductions by modern Tibetan teachers that provide an overview of some of the topics addressed in the remaining chapters of the book. The authors stress that the purpose of Buddhism is transformation, which requires (among other things) having a solid intellectual grasp of the teachings and then putting the teachings into practice. As Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche suggests, Buddhism is not just an inventory of concepts, but a path to be lived (p. 10). Other themes touched upon in the introductions include: acknowledging the deludedness of ordinary consciousness; the importance of renunciation; the need for a teacher/guru, and the importance of faith in and devotion to the guru; the importance of compassion; and the "pure perception" of Vajrayāna. All of these points are presented as essential elements of the Buddhist/*dzogchen* path; to consider any of them "extrinsic" or "optional" negates the path's transformative potential.

These themes and others are then developed in parts 2 and 3 of the book, "Starting Point" (five chapters) and "Integration" (twenty-eight chapters), respectively. One of the primary topics of part 2 is buddha-nature: the idea that the true nature of the person is primordially pure, but is obscured by ordinary, dualistic consciousness. As the authors acknowledge, beginning with buddha-nature is unconventional (usually, it's suffering). The approach is defended based on the claim that understanding one's potential for buddhahood inspires confidence on the path and therefore functions as an important basis for all subsequent practices.

Having acquainted the reader with buddha-nature, the book builds on that foundation through discussions of a full range of beginning-to-advanced teachings on such topics as suffering and renunciation, taking refuge in the Three Jewels (as an act of faith, devotion, and existential commitment), the necessity of effort and diligence, *anātman*, the necessity of prostrations, *samatha* and *vipaśyanā*, compassion and *bodhicitta*, etc. The selections on emptiness are helpful and include the classic presentation of the *Heart Sūtra* as well as modern explanations by Chögyam Trungpa and Thinley Norbu Rinpoche. Some of the discussion on emptiness may be challenging to the general reader, especially Thinley Norbu's outline of the different levels of Madhyamaka analysis (pp. 213–6). Occasionally the book touches upon more explicitly *dzogchen*-related themes, in particular, the esoteric/tantric presentations of taking refuge and

*bodhicitta*. Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche's stress on "non-distraction from mind essence" likewise expresses a *dzogchen* ideal, though he emphasizes at the same time cultivating devotion to the guru and faith in the Buddhist views (i.e., a firm conviction in the existence of buddha fields and hell realms, the law of karma, etc., pp. 178–80).

The overall quality of the entries is excellent, though I would dispute the editor's claim that the book as a whole is appropriate for beginners (p. xv). Most of the chapters are, but a few are little more than outlines of Buddhist paths/doctrines full of unexplained technical vocabulary and unlikely to be useful or comprehensible to anyone but an advanced student. Without a strong background in the tradition, a summation of the paths, *bhūmi*-s, and "factors of enlightenment" (p. 236ff) is useless. The glossary at the end of the book helps, but is incomplete. The book is also presented as a "practical guide" to Buddhist practice. While it certainly could be helpful in cultivating Buddhist attitudes, the specific practices described generally require the guidance and elaboration of a teacher. (See, for example, the "ceremony for taking the bodhicitta vow" on pp. 185–6. The visualization practice described on pp. 159–62 also requires a teacher or extensive familiarity with the tradition.) On the other hand, Schmidt hopes the book will be used in the context of a class or study-group led by a knowledgeable teacher (she includes "Facilitator Guidelines" at the end of book for just such a purpose). In that case, problems with the book's vocabulary and conceptual content could be addressed by the group's facilitator.

For a beginning practitioner, the most useful chapters are those by modern Tibetan lamas, discussing in a clear and sometimes moving style core Buddhist teachings on impermanence, suffering, death, karma, etc. Some of the best material in the book involves extended discussions of the four "mind changings," intended to promote a sense of spiritual urgency and establish an ethical foundation for the path: reflection on (1) the preciousness of a human birth, (2) impermanence and death, (3) the karmic law of cause and effect, and (4) the pervasiveness of suffering. Particularly powerful statements of the Buddhist views are Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche's "Renunciation Mind" (pp. 102–7) and Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche's discussion of impermanence and renunciation (pp. 108–110).

As already indicated above, *The Dzogchen Primer* is not a book for scholars. There is no critical analysis of the tradition or attempt to historically contextualize any of the doctrines or practices. (Padmasambhava, for example, is presented as the author of a number of selections, without any indication that the texts are *terma* and what this means in a Tibetan context.) Schmidt, however, did not compile the book for scholars, but for practitioners. Her goal is to provide "a much-needed corrective to the many misconceptions and wrong views being promoted about *dzogchen* . ." (p. ix). In this regard, the book is a success. The meaning of "simplicity" and

“effortlessness” is lost on the ordinary mind; on the other hand, these concepts gain the most profound significance for the mind trained in conventional Buddhist attitudes and practices. By guiding the reader in the cultivation of such attitudes, the book provides a strong foundation for an authentic understanding of *dzogchen*.

***Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School.* By James W. Heisig. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001, xi, 380 pages. Hardcover: \$42; paperback: \$21.95.**

### **Peter Suares**

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The aim of the Kyoto School has been to “introduce *Japanese* philosophy into world philosophy while at the same time using western philosophy for a second look at Japanese thought trapped in fascination with its own uniqueness” (p. 270). Heisig’s stated goal is to introduce the thought of three principal philosophers of the School: Nishida’s foundational ideas about nothingness, Tanabe’s philosophy as their counterfoil, and the creative enlargements of Nishitani (p. 7).

Heisig’s claim (p. ix) that his book is the first general overview of the Kyoto School and that there has yet been no study of it in the context of world philosophy (p. 279) is debatable—Heisig himself mentions a few precedents. But *Philosophers of Nothingness* may well be the most comprehensive presentation to date focused on the three main figures of the School. Heisig proposes to pursue two somewhat disparate goals: on the one hand, to let Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani speak with their own, Eastern and Buddhist, voices; on the other, to present them in a global intellectual context. By reaching these goals, Heisig promises to demonstrate the original contribution of the Kyoto School to world philosophy. He is well prepared to deliver on the promise. Intimate familiarity with both traditions allows him to recognize both the cultural uniqueness of the Kyoto School and the instances where he believes its three philosophers do not live up to their claim of creating world-class ideas. The book is well balanced, supplementing philosophical analysis with biographical and cultural background information from diaries, letters, and second-source commentaries, and offering critical evaluation of the reception of Kyoto-School ideas in Japan and abroad. The information is multi-faceted, impartial, well researched, and comprehensive.

Heisig's focus on three principal figures of the Kyoto School scales the topic down to manageable proportions. Absolute nothingness, the core concept shared by the three, provides a unifying thread. It is absolute nothingness, rather than a higher *being*, that functions as the ground for all things, "at once embracing and penetrating the inherent contradictions and relative nothingness at the limits of being" (p. 129). Heisig's attention to this foundational concept is particularly appreciated given the obscurities of thought and expression characteristic of his three subjects; it systematizes the book into a guide through what for many readers would otherwise remain a forbidding maze. Heisig offers a wealth of pointers to further sources of information on the Kyoto School, and steers the reader away from the poor Western translations. The material is organized around the logic of ideas. Heisig follows ideas "without paying too much attention to their dating or the development of their interlocking" (p. 49), and where helpful, "overlays earlier ideas with later ones" (p. 112). For Nishida and Tanabe, his strategy is to "avoid dividing their career into stages," and "instead to concentrate on recurrent themes" (p. 190). For Nishitani, it is to "focus on specific motifs. . . with a minimum attention to their dating or locating them in the development of his ideas" (p. 190). These disclaimers notwithstanding, Heisig does trace the rough lines of the evolution of thought in each of the three philosophers as well as the influences between them, and carefully distinguishes the particular contributions of each to the ideas they share; he also supplies basic chronologies.

The central segment of the book contains three sections, one on each of the thinkers. It is preceded by a single "Orientation," where Heisig describes the emergence of the Kyoto School in parallel with the development of Western philosophy in modern Japan. He describes the core assumptions of the School as inward-directedness (interest in the transformation of consciousness and preference for the direct experience unencumbered by critical logic or religious doctrine), the unity of awareness and reality, the latter taken "simply as it is," and an uncritical attitude toward Japan. A sketch of the history of the studies on the Kyoto School in the West is included.

The three sections forming the central part of the book are divided into chapters that are short (2–4 pages) and manageable, with the seamless transitions between them helping eliminate potential choppiness. The last section is followed by "Notes," a seventy-page appendix serving as a commentary to the main text and a valuable resource of background data. It is to this section that Heisig relegates more detailed observations about the parallels between his three thinkers and Western philosophy. A disadvantage of this approach is the inconvenience of having to match multiple quotations dispersed throughout a particular chapter with their credits strung at the end of the corresponding section of "Notes." On the other hand, the reader may find it handy to have comments and notes in an

aggregate, rather than as footnotes disrupting the flow of the main text. A bibliography concentrates on the Western translations of primary sources and the Western secondary literature, but also includes a number of Japanese publications. Although not exhaustive, it is quite extensive and up-to-date, including some obscure but valuable items that an average reader would be otherwise unlikely to unearth.

The section on Nishida, like the two that follow it, opens with a good biographical introduction to its subject and an evaluation of his philosophical and literary style. At the outset, Heisig paints a picture of Nishida as something of a dilettante jumping from one idea to another, drawing his inspiration from quickly-read and half-understood Western texts; a man limited to a handful of ideas on which he rings the changes tirelessly throughout his life; and a hasty writer using an obscure style, who at times cannot understand his own texts when pressed for clarifications by the critics. Heisig sums up Nishida's first book, *An Inquiry into the Good*, as unfocused, awkward, and "wobbling," albeit with "daring and giant strides" (p. 40). All the flaws, Heisig assures us, are offset by Nishida's originality. The section tries to prove the point.

According to Nishida, individual consciousness can reflect on the absolute principle rationally, but at the same time, since it is itself a manifestation of that principle, it can also intuit it directly. This is not just speculation, but rather Nishida's philosophical reconstruction of the "pure experience" of Zen awakening. His central idea is that reality has a single principle: awareness. Originally a unity, awareness unfolds in time (p. 42), producing the seemingly disparate "I" and "world." That "I" is ordinary self-awareness, which is a secondary, undesirable formation that needs to be dismantled. With this accomplished, the objective world, the corollary opposite of "I," is also gone, leaving one to enjoy—within the now "true" self—reality in its pristine state, "simply as it is." In this condition, with both an identifiable knower and his/her object suppressed or transcended, the activity of knowing becomes identical to its content—"a seeing without the seer or the seen." Reality simply as it is represents the ultimately affirmative view of the world. Technically speaking, it emerges through a double negation, where the negation of the subject and the object is in turn negated. More precisely, the target of that second, absolute negation is the relativity of the first. The first negation does not completely efface the subject and the object, leaving behind their negative shadow, so to speak. It takes the second negation to eliminate this shadow and so to bridge the remaining gap to the absolute. The affirmation built upon this double negation is that of the absolute nothingness. Absolute nothingness is the source of reality, the ground of both the individual consciousness and the historical world. It replaces Nishida's first major philosophical idea, "pure experience," and its later incarnations as absolute will and (self-)awareness. Nishida, Heisig says, takes the idea of pure experience from William

James and then extends it into ontology, making it into the metaphysical principle based on the identification of reality with consciousness.

In Nishida's later philosophy, "absolute nothingness" itself recedes into the background while the thinker toys with new angles on his central insight, producing one ultimate principle after another: active intuition, body, self-identity of absolute contradictories, knowing by becoming, eternal now, and locus. Heisig demonstrates indirectly that virtually all Nishida's principles can be distilled to the unity of reality and consciousness, the unity made possible through the suppression of the subject and the ensuing disappearance of the object, which—as we saw earlier—results in the identity of the activity and the content of consciousness. Locus is actually not so much another version of this principle as the super-principle, the ultimate framework or ground for all the others. The self-identity of absolute contradictories (the logic of *soku*, or affirmation-in-negation), too, has a somewhat special status as a formal pattern at the base of Nishida's thought. The meaning of *soku* is close to "i.e.," "at the same time," or "and also" (p. 66). Heisig warns that "A *soku* not-A" should not be understood as "A is not-A" in a strict logical sense, for that would be "talking nonsense." Instead, it should be taken to mean "something like 'A-in-not-A is A'." We could perhaps also phrase it as "A is A in not being A." The intended meaning, Heisig says, is that a thing is truly itself only at a level beyond that of ordinary, dichotomizing perception, and that it maintains its identity not by virtue of its own substantiality, which would pit it squarely against the epistemological subject, but through relativity grounded in absolute nothingness.

To bring the elusive sense of Nishida's formula closer to the reader, Heisig attempts to elucidate it in the framework of Western logic. Are "A" and "not-A" (or, "A" and "A-in-not-A") contradictories, contraries, or correlatives—or do they simply coincide? Now, generally, the law of contradiction states that a thing cannot be A and not-A at the same time. Two propositions are defined as contrary when both can be false but not true. They are correlative if they are reciprocally related so that each implies the existence of the other. They coincide when they occupy the same place in space or time, or correspond or agree in nature, character, or function. Heisig initially suggests that "what Nishida calls 'contradictories' are often closer to what we might call 'contraries' or 'correlatives'" (ibid.). He does not specify the sense in which they may be regarded as contraries. But he does explain that the terms "A" and "not-A" can be thought of as identical in the sense of correlatives that, according to dialectical logic, "require one another and a common medium (or universal) to be understood" (ibid.). One correlative term entails the other, such as in the pairs self-other, life-death, and past-future. On the other hand, understood as the identity of strict contradictories, Nishida's formula would "offend the rules of logical discourse"—it would be nonsensical (ibid.).

And yet, Heisig reports that "surprisingly enough, [Nishida] seems to have been [intending his formula as a contradiction]." He believes that Nishida's purpose is, first, to refute "the subject-object dichotomy" and second, to "point to the basic contradiction between being and nothingness" (p. 67). As Heisig observes, Nishida fails in his first objective, the refutation, because the formula "A *soku* not-A," when interpreted as referring to subject and object, expresses but a simple identity in which one opposite is equated with the other. Rather than effectively refuting the difference, such an identity turns out to be "no better than, say, poetic or artistic expression in which things are allowed to run together." But, according to Heisig, Nishida succeeds in his second objective. If we understand the formula as a way of stating that each thing is a *coincidence* of the relative and the absolute, then the self-identity of the two terms that make up a thing expresses "the location of the relative world of being in an absolute of nothingness" (*ibid.*).

In summary: Although the two terms, A and not-A, are closer to being contraries or correlatives, Nishida insists on calling them contradictories; and his claim is legitimate insofar as one term coincides with the other, which is the case if one stands for the relativity of a thing, and the other for its absolute nihility. Now, if the reader finds that keeping up with the distinctions between contrariness, contradictoriness, correlativity, and coincidence has been no easy matter, our confusion may be compounded by finding that "we see contradictories and contraries coinciding in the world of being" (*ibid.*). Further, we will likely have trouble following the train of the argument *unless* we have grasped Nishida's understanding of the relationship between relativity and absolute nothingness. But in a circular way, the argument is unfolded *in order to* clarify that relationship. The definition of the relationship as collocation or "the location of the relative world of being in an absolute of nothingness" is helpful but vague. At the end, we seem to have little choice but resignedly to agree with Heisig's conclusion that Nishida's concept of self-identity of absolute contradictories reflects the difficulty consciousness and language have with capturing reality.

The next topic is art and morality, which Nishida considers to be two distinct self-expressions of the single absolute principle, the self-effacement of ego. Neither claims much of the philosopher's attention. The same is true for religion and God, and then again for the historical world, Nishida's theory of which Heisig assesses as one of the weakest points of his thought. Since the philosopher is interested mainly in history's place in the system of metaphysics, rather than in the analysis of historical processes as they unfold in time, he leaves a "gap . . . between the metaphysical ground of the historical world in absolute nothingness and the actual events that make up that world as we live in it" (p. 70). That gap is profound, extending from the question of history deep into the core of



Nishida's philosophy. For example, Nishida believes that things can be made to appear "just as they are" as soon as the operation of the ordinary self and its representation of the world as its object are suppressed. What gets eliminated in the process is the "I" as the "organizational, central 'point' in consciousness" that "grasps [the world] in perception and judgment" (p. 73). Taken as a recommendation to function in the world without organizing, perceiving, and judging, the idea is astonishing but consistent with Nishida's inattention to historical reality. But if the philosopher is trying to say that it is absolute consciousness that takes over the organizational activity, perception, and judgment of the individual—that the perceptual and other activities automatically restart on the absolute level—he leaves us in the dark as to the precise nature of this development. The doubt raised by this point is of a kind with the uneasy feeling one has about the tenability of Nishida's "pure experience." Again, on p. 76, Heisig describes Nishida's attempt to resolve the dualisms such as that between the individual and the universal or that between the historical and the absolute by structuring reality as a series of progressively more inclusive classes or universals, each embracing and determining its predecessor, with the ultimate universal, absolute nothingness, at the end. In effect, instead of the initial *two* worlds (historical and absolute), Nishida now offers us a *multi-layered* hierarchy. What Heisig does not mention is that this alleged solution only pushes the problem of dualism a step back. Structuring reality into multiple layers does not remedy the original dichotomy unless we assume that the degree of absoluteness increases stepwise from one universal to the next. But such an assumption would be equivalent to identifying universality with absoluteness, where a higher universal (or a larger class) is considered to be more absolute. Such identification seems to be unwarranted. Once we reject it, the idea of gradual absolutization becomes untenable. Instead, all the universals (classes) except absolute nothingness—which is the "universal of universals" or the "class of all classes"—must be seen as belonging wholly to the historical world. Absolute nothingness, on the other hand, remains absolute, an isolated, supra-historical entity in itself. The chasm between the two worlds, although camouflaged by the hierarchization of one of them, runs as deep and distinct as before; the mechanism through which the absolute determines the relative remains unexplained. Other examples of Nishida's indifference toward historical reality are his lack of interest in social questions, the dependence of his conception of culture on the metaphysics of nothingness (p. 87), and his unfortunate support of Japan's militaristic ideology during the war period. (Heisig's general observation here is that out of the three figures, only Tanabe's endorsement of Japan's war effort is formally built into the philosophy itself, while in case of Nishida and Nishitani, that endorsement represents little more than a "flirtation with Japanism" [p. 262]).

The next section of the book is devoted to Tanabe's "Gothic philosophical cathedral" (p. 112). Heisig organizes his discussion of Nishida's younger colleague around three points. The first is the dialectic of absolute mediation as applied to "Tanabe's crowning idea" (ibid.), the logic of the specific or species. The second consists in his political philosophy. The third is the philosophy of repentance and absolute critique of reason. Heisig's overall plan is "to show that [despite this diversity, Tanabe's] thought does present a total structure from beginning to end" (p. 112–113). The first few chapters trace the young Tanabe's interest in Kant, neo-Kantianism, scientific positivism, and phenomenology, and sketch his early ideas about natural sciences, morality, freedom, and teleology. Later, building upon the Hegelian model of reality, Tanabe develops a theory of absolute mediation, where "each thing and individual consciousness is at one and the same time its own self and an other to every other thing with which it interacts, and apart from this interaction nothing exists" (p. 117). Tanabe asserts that a thing is not simply itself but rather itself-*in*-other; that is, it represents affirmation-*in*-negation, for there is no pure affirmation or pure negation without its opposite (p. 118). According to Heisig, the crucial point in Tanabe's philosophy of mediation is not that "things are what they are because they are not other things, or that things are related to one another by not being one another," but rather that "these very relationships are always and ever mediated by other relationships. Nothing on its own relates to anything else directly, but always through the agency of other relationships" (p. 118). This not entirely lucid point becomes somewhat clearer in the subsequent discussion of the logic of the specific. Tanabe builds that logic upon the category of species, understood as a sociocultural substratum of a particular race, a mode of thought of an "ethnic society" that gives it its identity but also makes it a specific and, consequently, closed society. Only the category of the state, an absolute relativized through interaction with other states, can counteract the isolation of the species. In the period preceding the Second World War, Tanabe increasingly tailors his view of the role of the state to the taste of the national propaganda. Arguing that Tanabe's "political deviation resulted from a failure to examine his own premises and to heed his own warnings" (pp. 112–113), Heisig nevertheless tries to show the consistency of Tanabe's political thought within his philosophical corpus. One fourth of the section—a proportion similar to that in the section on Nishitani but larger than the one-sixth in the case of Nishida—is devoted to Tanabe's political involvement during the war. That includes a summary of several contemporary critiques leveled at Tanabe and a discussion of the moderate degree of the philosopher's ensuing "repentance."

After the war, Tanabe makes a constructive use of what bad conscience he has developed over his political behavior. The result is his *Philosophy as Metanoetics*. Negatively, the new thinking expressed in that book takes

Western philosophy systematically to task for its espousal of rationality. Having attempted to demonstrate the ultimate impotence of Western thought, Heisig continues, Tanabe proposes a positive alternative consisting in reason's submission to religion. Since one cannot expect reason to destroy itself, this must be accomplished through recourse to the Other-power. Embodied in Amida, the Other-power takes over from reason the burden of critiquing rationality. This point ties in with a subsequent chapter where Heisig expounds on the origins of Tanabe's divergence from Nishida and offers an interesting comparison between the two thinkers. The "true self" proposed by Tanabe, says Heisig (p. 171), is not Nishida's original state of awareness successfully undoing the damage wrought by discriminating consciousness, but rather one that, unable to escape its core delusions and finitude, rejects the self-power and gives itself over to the Other-power of Amida. Truth is attained at the point where the self realizes it can never attain it by itself. Regrettably, Heisig moves through this difficult but important point rather quickly, making do with a comment that although the awakening "does not dispose of the self's finiteness," yet "somehow" it reaffirms its existence (*ibid.*). Tanabe also differs from Nishida in their respective conceptions of pure experience. While the latter defines pure experience in predominantly subjective terms, Tanabe is unwilling to exclude from it the element of objective knowledge. This qualifies his philosophy as "objective idealism" in contrast to Nishida's "subjective" one (p. 113). Tanabe further criticizes Nishida for ignoring mediation as the dynamic basis of reality, and for slipping instead into contemplation of the "self-identity of absolute contradictories" which Tanabe sees as the static, Plotinian ONE in disguise (p. 315). Finally, there is a difference in the way the two thinkers approach absolute nothingness. While Nishida considers it—in the context of the true self—to be "seeing without the seer or seen," for Tanabe absolute nothingness expresses the non-substantial and non-mediated principle of mediation that constitutes the historical world, "almost a kind of *Élan vital*, a dynamic that keeps the dialectic of interrelatedness going" (pp. 121–122). Later in Tanabe's philosophy, absolute nothingness becomes "enriched by the idea of Other-power in Pure Land Buddhism" as discussed earlier. This transformation reflects the shift in Tanabe's philosophical interest between the earlier and later stages of his career. But if the Tanabe section abounds in such transformations and shifts, some at least can be accounted for simply by inconsistent or misleading terminology employed. One example is offered by the use of the term "culturism." On p. 123, Heisig defines Tanabe's understanding of it as worship and emulation of high culture from abroad. But two pages later, he speaks about "the closed mentality of contemporary [Taishō-era] Japan that showed up in its culturism." And on p. 194, we read that culturism is "the culture of autonomy" that characterizes the modern world, negatively infecting religious consciousness. Now, emulation of

foreign culture, closed mentality, and autonomy are at best unrelated, and at worst inconsistent, terms. Closed mentality can be associated with emulation of foreign culture and autonomy, respectively, only under the negative interpretation of emulation as concomitant with diffidence or obtuseness, and of autonomy as disregard for others. This interpretation seems to be substantiated on p. 147, where the specificity of the sociocultural substratum is said to "close the will to moral action in the name of ideals from outside" and oppose all mediation, and on p. 148, where the specific is nevertheless credited with offering a possibility of redemption from ignorance and "self-will" (which presumably are characteristics of culturism). We seem to advance a little in "Notes" on p. 316, where a distinction is made between the positive, metaphysical culturism and "the crude antipolitical and antisocial culturism that Tanabe saw as distinctive of Taishō thinkers." What seems to be relatively clear throughout these references is that "culturism" is related to specificity. But this does not help determine whether culturism is characterized by openness or closeness, for the terms "specific" and "species" are themselves multivalent and can carry either meaning. Heisig uses "specific" interchangeably with "a people," "society" or "ethnic society," "species" (e.g., p. 126), and "race." Confusingly, he keeps switching between the terms "nation" and "state"; on p. 320 we also read about "the specificity of society and nation." On p. 132, Heisig says that from Tanabe's very first essay on the logic of the specific, "it is clear that Tanabe saw nation as the necessary condition for salvation from the irrationality of the specific." But on p. 147, he observes that "Tanabe had never denied his initial position that the nation shares with the ethnic closed society that essential and permanent presence of *nonrationality* that is the mark of the specific," and he seems to use "nation" and "species" synonymously. For example, the context suggests that "nation" in the statement "nation loses the character of simple immediacy. . ." (p. 149, last line) is synonymous with "species." Yet, passages such as "nation as the salvation of the realm of the specific (a people)" (p. 147) show that the two are quite distinct. While it is possible that the variation in Heisig's usage of terms simply reflects the metamorphoses of Tanabe's thought, the book does not furnish sufficient evidence for such conclusion. The Tanabe section closes with a discussion of the philosopher's dialectic of death (the "death" of everyday self as a condition of awakening to true self) and a survey of his late publications on literature and aesthetics.

The following section of the book is devoted to Nishitani. Heisig credits this "first-rate philosophical mind" (p. 255) with bringing the Kyoto School to prominence, and applies to his output expressions such as "masterpiece," "splendid but demanding," and "a giant step in the advance of Japanese philosophy and religious thinking onto the stage of world intellectual history." Nishitani's thought can be reduced to a few basic ideas. As Heisig says, the Japanese thinker was not interested in

developing a philosophical system, but rather in finding a unifying standpoint vis-à-vis reality and then in deepening it so as to overcome obstacles to “seeing things as they are.” Nishitani’s motivation is overtly religious. His goal in seeing things as they are is to overcome nihilism born out of the upheavals of modernity. To achieve this, Nishitani believes, nonrational insight is required into the fact that reality extends below the subject-object dichotomy, to the level of bottomlessness that is common to both. That common bottomlessness or non-substantiality is the standpoint of absolute nothingness—neither objective fact nor subjective theory, but a level of awareness at which the two interpenetrate. Nothingness is a standpoint; although it makes a separate *self* (the subject) disappear, its concept is based on the model of *self*-awareness that serves as a paradigm of all reality. Nishitani labels this standpoint “true self” or “no-self.” In true self, we act out of our naturalness, and things are as they really are. Breaking through to deeper awareness opens a new dimension in reality, where things and problems obsolete themselves in their ordinarieness and open in their suchness. With this in mind, Nishitani talks about “overcoming nihilism by passing through it.” Nothingness is rediscovered in the world of being without destroying that world (p. 244), but instead deepening it; the salvific “other shore” is this very world (p. 195), and the process of spiritual ascent is achieved through descent into radical finitude (p. 219).

That Heisig makes these few pivotal ideas reappear in various guises throughout the Nishitani section is a faithful reflection of the actual spiral, recursive development of the philosopher’s thought. As Heisig rightly observes, “Nishitani was always looking for the same thing, and once he found it, he went out to look for it again.” The first name by which Nishitani called that thing was “elemental subjectivity.” An early synonym of absolute nothingness, “elemental subjectivity” is achieved in Zen meditation at the point when one lets “the bottom drop out” from under one’s ordinary consciousness based on the idea of a solid self. This is the leading idea of Nishitani’s mystically tinged first book, *A Philosophy of Elemental Subjectivity* (1940); it continues to occupy the philosopher’s attention, with variations of terminology, throughout his career. Proceeding to examine Nishitani’s ideological contributions during the war period, Heisig believes that the politically engaged thinker was—just like Nishida—out of his philosophical element (p. 262). Nishitani’s “abstract sermons,” as one critic put it, were out of touch with the concrete historical situation they were supposed to grasp, a situation symptomatic of Nishitani’s general difficulty in applying his theories to the problems of the actual world (p. 210). At the same time, Heisig cautions that “to dismiss Nishitani summarily for the statements made during the war, with no consideration of how he got through that position, is a far greater prejudice than Nishitani’s own prejudices had been” (pp. 213–214).

Next, Heisig examines Nishitani's idea of nihilism developed in the book *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*. The philosopher differentiates the European and Japanese nihilism, but blames both on the irreligious worldview fostered by the scientific progress. In Heisig's paraphrase of Nishitani, nihilism is overcome through recovering a will towards the future grounded in the past. This is to be achieved through plumbing one's spiritual depths, aided by the exploration of Buddhist nothingness and emptiness. Apart from this rather general recommendation, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism* does not present a working proposal for how to actually go about the task. Such proposal does not come until Nishitani's next major work, *Religion and Nothingness*, the discussion of which extends over three chapters in Heisig. Since "any genuinely philosophical problem needs to emerge from within oneself" (p. 217), *Religion and Nothingness* develops the problematic of nihilism in more pronouncedly psychological terms. According to Nishitani, the nihilistic process develops in stages. After realizing, in Great Doubt, the nihility of being, a nihilist on the way to enlightenment proceeds to nullify even that nihility, thereby arriving at absolute nothingness or emptiness. The double negation brings an affirmation of self and world. But now, seen in the perspective of absolute nothingness and true suchness, the former has been transformed into no-self and the latter, into things the way they really are.

Nishitani's approach is not without problems. As Heisig notes (p. 221), "that [Nishitani's final stage of no-self] is a higher and more real state is not self-evident from the start. By the same token, not every insight that Nishitani records along the way—including the reformulation of a great many western philosophical and theological ideas—is necessarily justified by his own passage, or even by the fact that it has a long tradition in the east standing behind it." Similarly difficult to justify is Nishitani's claim that from the standpoint of emptiness everything shows itself for what it is, but at the same unites itself with its opposite—fact with theory, the phenomenal with the noumenal, reality with mind. While Nishitani accounts for that unification on the ground that all oppositions are illusory, Heisig draws attention to the opacity of Nishitani's argument and its annoying circularity (pp. 223–224), which, as he notes, make this point one of the weakest in Nishitani's philosophy. Further, according to Nishitani, emptiness (associated with *samādhi*, a state of being mentally settled) allows one to act naturally, i.e., "in accord with the self-nature of oneself and all things. . . . This means that whatever is done in *samādhi* is done spontaneously, and not tailored to the form of one's personal wishes or even of one's ideals. . . . Behavior on this homeground of emptiness. . . is the spontaneous observance of a self no longer attached to itself so that it can 'realize' its surroundings" (p. 225). Although Heisig lets this passage go without a comment, we may disagree with the view implied here, that egolessness is our *natural* or spontaneous state.

Nishitani's essay published in 1962 under the title "Western Thought and Buddhism" may represent "Nishitani's way of thinking at its finest" as Heisig describes it, but it seems to bring little new to the idea of bottomlessness of absolute nothingness achieved in the state of non-self or true self. In the areas of ethics and history, again, Nishitani uses the same workhorse paradigm as a carrier of his solutions to concrete problems. Heisig is impatient with Nishitani's ethical remoteness (pp. 235, 236–237) and with his "ambiguity toward the ethical dimension of religion" (p. 238). Ethics is reduced to acting in accord with the self-awareness of non-ego (pp. 234–235). Reason, together with its application to concrete ethical problems such as social reform, is cast aside as an impediment to self-awareness (p. 237). In such view, "thou" or the "other" are reduced to a dimension of oneself ("no-self," in Nishitani's terminology); the I-Thou encounter is authentic only on the ground of nothingness (p. 234), and absolute enmity is absolute harmony. As Heisig is right to recognize, this borders on the nonsensical (p. 234). Similarly, "for many, if not most, of Nishitani's western readers, the chapters on time and history in *Religion and Nothingness* are the most dissatisfying because of their irrelevance to lived history" (p. 242). Nishitani believes that the problem of nihilism, embedded in the modern view of history, can only be overcome by a return to the origin of history itself, which is the "eternal now." There, "directly underfoot of the present," past and present are both transcended and made simultaneous—without destroying the temporal sequence just as it is. Nishitani blames nihilism equally on science, which he demonizes through oversimplification and clichés (p. 238). The solution Nishitani proposes is worn-out and disappointing: the scientific mode of thought is to be brought within the mind as a problem to be solved through an intrapsychic break to naturalness, which—as we have seen before—is the quality of something "as it is and of itself."

With advancing years, Nishitani is increasingly taken with Zen: "Zen examples fall into his texts fresh off the tree" (p. 249). But he tempers Zen's anti-rationalism by devising the concept of "imaging" through which the world appears in reason but without the substantiality of words and concepts and beyond the subject-object dichotomy. By creating an image of an object "on the field of emptiness," the subject senses the object in its immediacy; the image is both just an image and the object itself. Heisig makes it clear that "imaging" represents no revolutionary turn in Nishitani's thinking: "[T]he function of the image [was] never formally organized by Nishitani, nor did he go beyond these intimations to an interpretation of imagery that would have required some kind of symbolic theory. . . . One has to suppose that, as an old man who had found a position that basically sufficed for his inquiry into ultimate questions, he faced the twilight of his life with the almost ascetical refusal to distract himself in novelty" (p. 252). Here as throughout the book, Heisig's way of putting things is delightful.

Toward the end of the section, Heisig discusses Nishitani's views on organized religion and God. Nishitani's sees Western Christianity as intolerant, Japanese Christianity as not assimilated into the Japanese soil, and Buddhism as provincial, doctrinally and institutionally rigid, passive, and lacking a clear ethic (pp. 253–254). Nishitani believes that the Christian, personal God is an anthropomorphic projection of human attachment to self and being. It should be overcome by the true, impersonal God who embodies absolute nothingness and who opens in the enlightened awareness of no-self. Heisig is skeptical about "whether or not this method always works; one has the sense that the assumption of its applicability is more tacit than examined at times" (p. 245).

The pattern Heisig employs throughout the Nishitani section is to open a chapter with high praise for the philosopher and to close it with usually gentle but pointed criticism. In effect, Heisig presents the reader with a range of arguments as well as the opportunity to form a final opinion. Nevertheless, there are issues on which one may wish for a more decisive stand in the book. One such issue is Nishitani's psychologism, or turning of ontological problems into the material to be solved through a breakthrough to no-self. Heisig explains Nishitani's use of the Buddhist term *samādhi* as the common ground of mind and reality (p. 225) by the fact that "for Nishitani the structure of self-awareness is a paradigm of how all of reality is constructed," so "*samādhi* is not just a state of settled mind, . . . but the true form of all things as well" (p. 225). To justify this, Heisig suggests we accept Nishitani's invitation "to betake ourselves to the dimension where things become manifest in their suchness, to attune ourselves to the selfness of the pine tree and the selfness of the bamboo. . . ." (p. 226). One may or may not follow Heisig in finding this poetics "moving," but it is bound to be of little help as a key to the mechanics of Nishitani's idea of self-awareness serving as a bridge to the world of objects. And because such mechanics seems to be altogether missing, it is not easy to agree with Heisig that "the standpoint of emptiness entails an ontology and yet is not itself any philosophical position" (p. 226). On the contrary, it seems that Nishitani's standpoint is very much a position that does not add up to a coherent ontology. In fact, in his more critical moments Heisig recognizes this quite unequivocally. He characterizes Nishitani's effort "to delineate a conversion to the world in its 'true suchness,' a world that is neither subjective nor substantial but a 'middle way' that affirms itself in negating them both" as a *struggle* (p. 228). A few pages later, he also notes that "Nishitani's descriptions of the liberation of the self, or the encountering of true selfhood, are more mystical in tone than philosophical. . . . In this sense, Nishitani does not give philosophy an epistemology or ontology of the self so much as a permanent critique of all such ways of thinking" (p. 232). Heisig repeats this point later in relation to the Kyoto School as a whole. But



one regrets that these scattered observations do not evolve into a more systematic critique.

In the next section entitled "Prospectus," Heisig puts the central part of the book in perspective. We find here in a summary format much of the critical argumentation that was often only intimated before. The material is excellent, making one wish Heisig had used it earlier where he could have developed it in more detail. "Prospectus" opens with an outstanding review of the Kyoto School from several different angles. Heisig ranks the originality of the School fairly as below the greatest Western thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, James, and Heidegger. He also observes that compared with their contemporaries such as Whitehead, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Derrida, Habermas, and Gadamer, the Kyoto School "looks like something of an anachronism. What is more, a great many ideas in the philosophical tradition out of which Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani worked have been rejected" (p. 264; that last statement is tantalizing, for Heisig does not enlarge upon it anywhere in the book). Similarly, their contribution to the traditional Buddhist studies has been negligible. Their originality lies rather in "the appropriation of eastern ideas into western philosophy" (p. 260). Heisig notes that:

Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani do not really belong to the history of philosophy as we know it and under the assumptions that have dominated it up until now. Unless one is prepared to dismiss out of hand the idea of opening up western philosophy to the standpoint of world philosophy, there is literally no place to locate the Kyoto School properly. They have positioned themselves in a place as unfamiliar to the eastern mind as it is to the western. The question of locating them in effect questions the way we have located philosophies east and west. In this context, theirs is not a derivative contribution but something original and revolutionary (ibid.).

Heisig offers three good, although perhaps arbitrarily selected, suggestions for further research on the Kyoto School, by the same token pointing to the weaker spots of his own book: the relation between the three philosophers, the connection between them and the historical transformations of the day, and the central role of individual experience that the School holds up as the standard of truth and the foundation of philosophy. The last two points are particularly important since the disastrous engagement of the three thinkers in wartime events shows "the limits of a philosophy oriented to the contemplative" (p. 263). Heisig then singles out three topics as the suitable criteria for evaluating the place of the Kyoto School in the world philosophy (pp. 265–266). The first is their polyvalent notion of no-self, combining the soteriological, moral, and metaphysical

aspects, of which the moral one is distinctly underdeveloped. The second topic concerns the anthropocentric and subjectivist consequences of using the concept of self-awareness as a paradigm for the structure of reality, whereby the Kyoto School becomes the first culprit in what they criticize as the anthropocentrism of Western philosophy. The third topic has to do with the ambiguity of the notion "God," in which the School's critique of the Christian God intersects their own idea of God as a no-self approaching absolute nothingness.

In the course of the book, Heisig touches upon a few interesting, general questions. For example, to what extent should the Japanese philosophers be judged on their own terms rather than according to universal standards? In other words, is there an Oriental logic or only universal logic? Heisig endorses (pp. 36–37, 288) Nishida's view that there is "concrete" logic, or "a general sense of the principles of discourse" (meaning a Japanese logic), as separate from "methodological rules that distinguish a good argument from a bad one" (universal logic). Heisig never tries to prove the point directly. But indirectly he does a lot toward substantiating it, and his book is likely to convince the undecided readers that the "logic" of Zen and Pure Land mysticism does in fact constitute an alternative way to see the world.

Despite his emphasis on the idiosyncratic character of the Kyoto School philosophy, however, Heisig generally believes that its ideas are transferable across languages (p. 281). Perhaps this is why he discusses linguistic matters sparingly, to the certain disappointment of the readers interested in the Japanese equivalents of the key terms discussed. There is no substantial index of Japanese terms; only selected *kanji* appear, scattered across "Notes." For example, while explaining the meaning of the characters *kyō*, *gyō*, *shin*, and *shō* in Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō* (p. 322), Heisig does not show the characters themselves. In the Nishida section, one looks in vain for the original Japanese for the English "self-awareness" and "active intuition." And commenting on Nishitani's play on the polyvalence of the Chinese character for *samādhi* (p. 224), Heisig simply, and rather unkindly, advises the reader to consult the glossary in the English translation of *Religion and Nothingness*. Another cause for mild irritation is Heisig's occasional use of German and Latin expressions without translation. For example, "a *gewordener Buddhist*" (p. 254; literally meaning "someone who became a Buddhist," but here used apparently in the sense of "a past Buddhist") is an English-German neologism, the meaning of which can with some effort be deduced from the context, but which would otherwise be difficult to trace by someone unfamiliar with German and the Kyoto School scholarship. However, the language of the book is one of its strong points. Heisig writes in a lively style that increases our enjoyment of reading without detracting from the incisiveness of the argument. The book is free from heavy and potentially misleading philosophical termi-

nology; Heisig uses terms such as existence, essence, phenomenal, noetic, etc., only when referring to Western philosophy or when reporting on a Kyoto School thinker as himself using the term. Nevertheless, *Philosophers of Nothingness* requires patient, close reading. Some passages are not clear, and the argument can get convoluted, becoming more understandable only from the perspective of a later discussion. This, I believe, is due mostly to the abstruseness of the *ideas* discussed. Heisig's *interpretations* are usually remarkably clear, and—as far as I can say—almost always justified and trustworthy, if occasionally tendentious.

Heisig writes authoritatively, despite being self-critical at times. Overt references to secondary literature are infrequent, except in "Notes." He approaches his subjects with critical appreciation. He anticipates reader's objections, shows implications of the arguments he presents, and shores up the weaker points of the ideas under discussion by elucidating the unspoken or unconscious assumptions of their authors. Heisig defends the three philosophers when he fears their work may suffer from misunderstanding, for example, expressly refuting the reportedly common perception of Nishida's logic of absolute contradictoriness as "oriental mumbo-jumbo." Another case in point is Heisig's sensitive analysis of the three thinkers' political involvement during the war era, which he considers from the standpoint of the integrity of their philosophical thought and without a trace of moralizing. He carefully reconstructs the interplay between various strains of their motivations, and does not justify or condemn their collaboration with the military regime; he simply tries to understand it. But when appropriate, he is mercilessly critical—of their "fair share of commonplace and ordinary ideas" (p. 261), convoluted style, unclear and inconsistent thinking, and superficial understanding of Western sources.

With respect to Western philosophy, Heisig's presentation is generally accurate and apposite. But occasionally, he stereotypes and oversimplifies. For example on pp. 66–67, while correctly drawing attention to Nishida's dependence on Hegel, Heisig reduces the latter's central notion of negation unfairly to the "idea that a negation clarifies the meaning of an affirmation" and concludes sweepingly that for Hegel "*all* [the emphasis is Heisig's] contradiction, whether in categories of thought or in social movement, is simply the manifestation of a deeper unity that gives them their reality." On pp. 117–118, Heisig mentions "Nishida's concern that philosophical logic reach beyond grammatical form and rules of thinking to keep us in mind of the fact that there is, after all, an actual experiential world we are trying to explain, and that the mind that is trying to explain it is part of it." This concern is occasioned by "Hegel's model" of reality as absolute relationality. By implication, this suggests that it is Hegel whose philosophical logic does not reach beyond grammatical form and rules of thinking into the actual experiential world. If this passage refers to the speculative rather than empirical nature of Hegel's thought, the opinion is

warranted. But it is a biased interpretation of Hegel to say that the philosopher gave no consideration to the experiential world in his philosophical logic. Heisig does not state this directly, and he does not report Nishida as doing so, either. But the misleading implication is strongly present. On p. 120, while discussing Tanabe's attitude towards Hegel and Marx, Heisig characterizes—presumably their—dialectic of history as “an ultimately meaningless hydraulics of energy flowing back and forth between self and other to give each its identity by negating the other.” The qualification “ultimately meaningless” in this caricature betrays a very curious understanding of the Hegelian or Marxist view of history. There are also ideas and passages (admittedly infrequent) that introduce new concepts without explaining them, and those that contain inconsistencies that appear to result from oversight. On pp. 44–45, Heisig suggests that at the time the 40-year-old Nishida published his first book, “[he] simply did not know Hegel that well. . . , and much of what he knew he got indirectly from the neo-Hegelian Thomas Green.” But on p. 313, he reports that “from early on, Nishida was. . . swept up in the imaginative power of the Hegelian system and its aftermath.” Of course, Nishida could have been swept by Hegel without knowing him that well, but I suspect this is not what was meant. On p. 108, Heisig says: “Tanabe made a clean break from what he saw as. . . the abstract dogmatism of German Idealism. Soon thereafter, in the course of two years of lectures on Fichte and Schelling his interest in Hegel was piqued.” Given the fact that Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, alongside Kant, are considered to be the chief representatives of German Idealism and are often characterized as abstract and dogmatic, it must be from them that Tanabe has made a clean break. So how could he have lectured on Fichte and Schelling afterwards? And even if we concede that one does not necessarily exclude the other, how are we to explain Tanabe's *positive* attitude toward Hegel after the break? Heisig's intention here is difficult to understand. The book also contains quite a few proofreading errors.

A more general problem—despite Heisig's objective and critical stance—lies in his reluctance to take his analysis of the Kyoto School philosophy beyond a rather general level. In all fairness, the book is called *Philosophers of Nothingness* rather than *Philosophies of Nothingness*. Besides, Heisig seems to be intent on making the text accessible to a broad range of readers. But the price to pay, as he himself modestly acknowledges, is that the general reader may find the book a tight fit, while a reader already familiar with the subject will find it too loose (p. x). The occasional casualness of Heisig's philosophical scrutiny is part of this “looseness” of the book. For example, when observing that Nishida inversed the “logic of self-consciousness that he met in western thought” (p. 52), Heisig does not specify which Western thought he means. In his discussion of Nishida's philosophy of the Absolute as pure awareness, Heisig does suggest that

Hegel's notion of "Absolute Mind" and William James' *Essays in Radical Empiricism* exerted an influence on the Japanese philosopher. But although Heisig offers a good summary of James in this context, he leaves us in the dark regarding Hegel and his idea of Absolute—an idea without an understanding of which we will not be able to put Nishida in the right perspective. That is, we learn about the Hegelian parentage of Nishida's thought, but we are not adequately informed about what Hegelianism means (and it can mean a very broad range of things), either for Nishida or for Heisig. In another instance, when discussing Nishida's idea of will in reality and consciousness, Heisig writes: "[Nishida says] that 'It is not so much that I give birth to my desires, but that the motivation of reality *is me*'; and later on: 'The will is a fundamental unifying activity of consciousness, . . . a power of the self.' In the years ahead he will take these ideas further to see will, in this broad sense of a fundamental life force, as an absolute principle more fundamental than consciousness, in fact almost a rethinking of the idea of pure experience" (p. 46). This point in the book would significantly benefit from a comparison with Schopenhauer, whether Nishida consciously drew on his ideas or not. Yet, Heisig's reference to Schopenhauer, while not entirely absent, is limited to a single paragraph in "Notes" (p. 292). Without an adequate comparative analysis, we will not be in a position to know what new ideas, if any, Nishida's theory of absolute will has to offer the post-Schopenhauerian audience. Similarly, Heisig's discussion of Nishida's and Tanabe's conception of identity through opposition (pp. 81, 103, 117)—the more pronounced the opposition, the stronger the identity—is incomplete without a reference to Spinoza's insight that every determination is a negation, an idea that has influenced generations of European philosophers including the German Idealists who exerted such an enormous influence on the Kyoto School. Heisig's procedure may satisfy readers well versed in Western philosophy, those who can fill in the gaps for themselves. Others may walk away from the book without having understood some of its crucial passages. In the end, the scarcity of adequate comparative analyses makes it difficult for Heisig to keep his promise of showing the place of the Kyoto School thought in the world philosophy. Incidentally, Heisig points to that promise as the reason for "eliminating nearly all excursions into Buddhist thought." (On the occasions where he does mention the Buddhist roots of the Kyoto School, he refers to them for the most part *en bloc* as "Zen, Pure Land, Kegon, and Tendai Buddhist ideas" [pp. 25, 219, *et passim*], or "Eastern metaphysics" [p. 58].) Heisig justifies this "glaring omission," which indeed it is, by his wish to remain within the framework of traditional philosophy. But by committing it, he deprives us of a view on a major facet of his topic.

On the back cover of the book, Jan Van Bragt is quoted to say that Heisig's intellectual stature allows him to relive the ideas of the Kyoto School and place them in the wider history of philosophy. I fully agree with

the point about the intellectual stature. But, although I also acknowledge that Heisig has succeeded in placing the Kyoto School in the wider history of philosophy, I am not certain whether he did enough to make us understand *where* exactly that place falls. It is one thing to generate creative ideas, but quite another for those ideas to be world-class. Heisig shows the former to be true for Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani, but he does not conclusively prove the latter. For example (and I have already given analogous examples earlier), what new ideas does Tanabe's theory of absolute mediation add to the post-Hegelian world philosophy? What does his religious and ethical thought teach us beyond what we already know from Pure Land Buddhism and Kierkegaard? Heisig does not tell us, but, to his credit, he often graciously acknowledges the omissions when they occur. For example, Tanabe's *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, Heisig says, is a "dense book that defies abbreviation." If what Tanabe proposes appears to be an ordinary Christian theology, it is only because Heisig's abbreviation of his ideas has "eliminated both the full range and rigor of Tanabe's argument" (p. 159). Similarly in the section on Nishitani, p. 216, when relating the philosopher's analysis of the differential resolution of nihilism in Europe and Japan—an analysis essentially correct but apparently not particularly profound—he exonerates Nishitani on the latter count on the grounds that the philosopher has arrived at his conclusions "by a process of argument far too intricate to reproduce here." And again on pp. 221–222, we read: "So much is sacrificed here in the telling, not only of the careful way Buddhist and western philosophical ideas are interwoven but also of the existential feel of Nishitani's prose, that I am tempted to run page after page of quotation from the book into the text at this point. But even that, I fear, would not breathe the soul into the bare bones of this summary that Nishitani has inspired." Heisig may be right in principle, but I feel he is also being excessively diffident. I take the liberty of understanding this passage to mean that he finds the nature of Nishitani's excellence or originality difficult to determine. Such capitulation is disappointing given Heisig's facility with language and his superb command of the subject. In any case, the question of originality is to a large extent a matter of opinion, and besides, perhaps not all the readers will share the degree of my concern about it. Whatever their final verdict on this point may be, most should agree that overall, *Philosophers of Nothingness* is an outstanding commentary on the Kyoto School and a remarkable achievement of philosophical criticism.

***Neither Monk nor Layman: Clerical Marriage in Modern Japanese Buddhism.* By Richard M. Jaffe. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. xxiii, 288 pages. Hardcover, \$42.50.**

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In 1872, the Meiji government promulgated an unprecedented law, the so-called *nikujiki saitai* (clerical marriage and eating meat) law, lifted the ban on clerical marriage, meat-eating, and the wearing of nonclerical garb by the Buddhist clergy. The law stated: “[F]rom now on Buddhist clerics shall be free to eat meat, marry, grow their hair, and so on. Furthermore, they are permitted to wear ordinary clothing when not engaged in religious activities” (p. 72). This law symbolized one aspect of Japan’s attempts at modernization—the separation of religion from state, as influenced by the West. At the same time, this law actively contradicted renunciant, or “home-leaver” Buddhism (*shukke bukkyō*), because its doctrines made no allowance for clerical marriage and meat-eating.

This book focuses attention on an area which few scholars have researched. The author, Richard M. Jaffe, primarily describes how the issue of *nikujiki saitai* emerged and developed in a crucial period of Japan’s history, from the early Meiji through the beginning of the Pacific War in the late 1930s, and what kinds of arguments evolved from the various viewpoints on the issue. This book is divided into ten chapters.

In the first chapter, Jaffe takes up the situation of clerical marriage in the Sōtō school of Zen Buddhism as an example of a Japanese Buddhist denomination, and compares this practice with that of other monks in the Buddhist world.

This comparison reveals Japanese Buddhism to be an anomaly in relation to the rest of the Buddhist world, and Jaffe attributes this to the *nikujiki saitai* law. He then goes on to summarize each chapter. In the second chapter, he describes the origin of the notion of *nikujiki saitai* in the premodern era. This origin is against the historical background of strict deportment by all the Buddhist denominations (except the Shin denomination which already engaged in clerical marriage) that was imposed by the Tokugawa shogunate in order to maintain order.

In the third chapter, Jaffe discusses how, in contrast to the other Buddhist schools which were under strict regimentation in the Edo period, the government allowed Shin ministers to marry, which drew strong criticism from other Buddhist institutions. In order to advocate the validity of their practice, Shin scholars published a number of apologetics.

Jaffe argues in the fourth chapter that transformation of the social status of the Buddhist clergy was accompanied by the abolition of the social ranking system in the Edo period. This developed from the emergence of a new concept of "religion" (*shūkyō*), which was based on the Western conception of religion. The policy that separated religion from state led to the reform of the social roles of Buddhist clergy. Furthermore, attacks from Neo-Confucianists, Shintoists, Nativists, as well as Christians, put pressure on Buddhists to modernize themselves.

The fifth chapter focuses on the activities of Buddhist clergy in accommodating to the Meiji government's efforts to modernize the state, in resisting the spread of Christianity, and attempting to revive their clerical status. This chapter describes how their work enormously contributed to the creation of new religious policies.

In the sixth chapter, Jaffe examines the confrontation between Buddhist denominational leaders who tried to resuscitate the strict precepts, and others—such as governmental leaders laity—who argued that religious matters should be an individual issue and should not be under state control.

The seventh chapter continues the discussion of the sectarian leaders' opposition to the dissemination of the *nikujiki saitai*. Jaffe also explores how those Buddhist clergy who affirmed the *nikujiki saitai* concept modernized Buddhism in accord with modern concepts such as science, individual rights, or nationalism.

The eighth chapter describes the attempt of Tanaka Chigaku, a Nichiren priest, to reconstruct Buddhism in the modern world through the formation of a lay Buddhist denomination. Tanaka produced new Buddhist rituals to fit with the new lifestyle of a conjugal family. Although in contrast to Tanaka's position most leaders disagreed with clerical marriage, they also actively reformed Buddhism in order to suit the new conceptions of the importance of the family.

In the ninth chapter, Jaffe examines how the new generation of Buddhist clergy came to favor the *nikujiki saitai* through biological and medical arguments. He also provides a statistical analysis of clergy who actually married, despite the contradiction between their practices and doctrine. This chapter also introduces the problems of temple succession, that is, who takes over the role of clergy, and the social status of the wives and children of clergy. These issues are still ambiguous even in the present day.

In the final chapter, Jaffe summarizes all the arguments above and points out that the issues concerning the *nikujiki saitai* have not yet been resolved, and underlie the foundation of modern Japanese Buddhism.

Although one of the most important purposes of this book is to explore the impact of the *nikujiki saitai* law in modern Japan (which has not previously been studied in depth), Jaffe makes all the arguments richer not



only due to his examination of the discussion among Buddhist denominations, but because he also pays great attention to the peripheral circumstances surrounding the law, doing so in a balanced manner. As the contents of this book proceed in historical sequence, despite the intricate interlacing of the numerous factors concerning the *nikujiki saitai* law, Jaffe describes them thoroughly, drawing upon source materials in a comprehensive way. Nevertheless, since this book focuses more on developing an overall grasp of the historical situation of Japanese Buddhism, it does not delineate the doctrinal arguments in detail. This may not satisfy readers who are interested in doctrinal inconsistency with the *nikujiki saitai* law.

For instance, although Jaffe compares the state of clerical life in the modern world with Shinran's concept of "neither monk nor layman," Shinran's proclamation of this notion is based on the historical fact that his priesthood was taken away as part of the suppression of the *nembutsu* teaching. A distinction needs to be made between the modern struggle over these issues on the part of clergy of other denominations, and Shin thought, for which this was not problematic. I think that Jaffe may have superimposed Shinran's situation onto Japanese Buddhism in the modern period, based on the superficial similarities of the two in relation to meat-eating and clerical marriage. While the intent of the work is an understanding of Japanese Buddhism in the modern world, the incautious reader might be led to misunderstand Shinran's views on these concepts.

But again, the magnificent research of this book is groundbreaking not only in the Western world, but also in the world of Japanese academic study of Buddhism. Jaffe succeeds in illuminating the fundamental problem that almost all denominations have turned away from since the time of the Pacific War. This issue deeply relates to their identities. This is the requisite book for us to rethink what Japanese Buddhism is in the contemporary world.

