
Shohei Ichimura, *Buddhist Critical Spirituality: Prajñā and Śūnyatā*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2001, xvii + 435 Pp. Bibliography and Index. Rs. 795.

Shohei Ichimura is currently Director of the North American Institute of Zen and Buddhist Studies. This volume is a collection of fifteen articles discussing Buddhist critical insight on the basis of cross-cultural studies in Buddhism that

were originally presented at various occasions between 1989 and 1999. The papers are arranged in four sections under the cover title *Buddhist Critical Spirituality: Prajñā and Śūnyatā* in an attempt to create a consistent progression of topics. Ichimura's general intent in this work is to first academically clarify the transcultural nature of Buddhist spirituality as originated by Śākyamuni, developed by Nāgārjuna, and embodied in the Kuan-yin faith that spread over East Asia, and then to attempt to propose it as a key concept for promoting peaceful global communication. In this sense, this volume represents his sincere response as a Buddhist scholar with over forty years' academic career to contemporary religious and cultural conflicts.

The first section, entitled "Buddhist critical spirituality in history and culture", consists of three articles: 1 "Śākyamuni's critical spirituality and India's crisis", 2 "Nāgārjuna's historicity on the basis of *Suhrllekha* and *Ratnāvalī*", and 3 "Buddha's love and human love with focus on Kuan-yin Bodhisattva".

The first article explores the ethical significance of the critical spirituality created by Śākyamuni in the process of transcending the conflict between the Śākyan tribal community and Brahmanical society from a socio-cultural perspective in an attempt to suggest its possible contribution to "the realization of undistorted equality and creative democracy of a multi-religious society" (p. 3). The second article attempts to unify Nāgārjuna's multiple personalities, such as logician, definitive dialectician, learned commentator, and political and religious councilor on the one hand, with his historical presence on the other in an argument against the "compartmentalization" in past research. Ichimura analyses the contents of the two differently directed works ascribed to Nāgārjuna, the *Suhrllekha*, with Hinayāna orientation, and the *Ratnāvalī*, with Mahāyāna orientation, and proposes the hypothesis that "Nāgārjuna may have had an association with the Śāka Satrap of Ujjayinī besides the Śātavāhana king of Andhra country, and thus, as their counsellor, he wrote the *Suhrllekha* and the *Ratnāvalī* respectively for the rival contenders of political and military supremacy over Western India" (pp. 33-34). In the third article Ichimura employs an analysis of the characteristics of Kuan-yin (Avalokiteśvara in Skt) Bodhisattva in Chinese Buddhism to argue that it is the insight of *śūnyatā* that provides the theoretical basis of Buddhist love and compassion, thus repudiating Lokesh Chandra's view that Avalokiteśvara was a metamorphosis of the Hindu deity Brahmā, whose Indian cult could be closely identified with the East Asian cult of Kuan-yin.

The second section, "Nāgārjuna and Mādhyamika dialectic of critical spirituality", includes four papers: 4 "Nāgārjuna's dialectic analyzed in terms of *Anvaya-Vyatireka*", 5 "Ābhīdharmika logical crisis and Mādhyamika dialectical solution", 6 "Nāgārjuna and *Upāyahṛdayaśāstra*", and 7 "Structural linkage between Nāgārjuna's dialectic and logic".

The fourth article establishes the roles of *anvaya* (positive exemplification) and *vyatireka* (contrapositive exemplification) as the crucial principles of Nāgārjuna's and the Mādhyamika school's dialectical method of refutation (*reduction-ad-absurdum*). The fifth article explores the logical problem of the

Kathāvatthu concerning the linkage of the trans-empirical psycho-physical elements (*dharmas*) with the empirical person (*pudgala*), and posits Nāgārjuna's dialectic as its solution, "because the way ancient Buddhist thinkers resolved the said crisis was not an isolated event of the past but has its direct implication with our contemporary Buddhist endeavor in the effort of preserving not only Buddhist tradition but also all human cultures as a whole" (p. 148). The sixth article discusses the authorship of *Upāyahṛdayaśāstra* and proposes the hypothesis that this text may have been "the ground work for Nāgārjuna to later on develop his method of dialectic in which he maximized the use of *dr̥ṣṭāntā*" (p. 187). The seventh article attempts to back-up the above-mentioned hypothesis by analyzing Nāgārjuna's dialectical solutions to the Abhidharmika and extra-Buddhist logical impasses.

The third section, "Chinese Buddhist critical spirituality and its culture", consists of four articles: 8 "The significance of Chinese Buddhist philosophy for the contemporary world", 9 "The Chinese Mādhyamika Sêng-chao's paradoxical method of argument", 10 "*Heart Sūtra* translated by Hsüan-Tzang and Kumārajīva and its cultural impact", and 11 "Critical classification of Buddhist doctrines and its future".

The eighth and ninth articles share a similar direction. The former examines Confucian and Mohist logical thinking in comparison with Indian logic and uses references to the characteristics of Sêng-chao's paradoxical argument in his work *Chao-lun* and Chih-i's T'ien-t'ai view of *śūnyatā*, which were influenced by the Chinese philosophical background, in an attempt to evaluate the significance of Chinese Buddhist philosophy in the contemporary world. The latter focuses on Sêng-chao's paradoxical form of argument employing the mohist logical principle of "the ultimate spiritual context" (*hsiao 効*), contrasting it with Nāgārjuna's *reduction-ad-absurdum* method on the *kāraka-śabda*. Ichimura concludes in this article:

Between Indian Buddhism that arose in ancient India and developed within that cultural context and that Buddhism which there was transmitted to China and developed in that cultural context, there should be some difference. If Buddhism's spirituality is transcultural and hence identical between the two, and if the respective forms are culturally bound, the difference between the two ought to be mutually complementary. In view of these points of consideration, the early Chinese Madhyamakika (*sic.*) Sêng-chao and his work *Chao-lun* provide further opportunity of research enquiry on Buddhist spirituality with respect of its extra-trans-cultural and intra-trans-cultural. (p. 255)

The tenth article attempts to prove that "what was crucial to the Kuan-yin cult in China was the insight of *śūnyatā* embodied in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, not a Hindu spiritual basis of Brahmā, that has always linked to Kuan-yin personification of love and compassion" (p. 280), by tracing the cultural influence of the *Heart-sūtra* translated by Hsüan-Tzang and Kumārajīva. The eleventh article presents a survey of the *Chiao-p'an* Buddhism of Medieval China and draws on the detailed introduction to Bruno Petzold's work: *The Classification of*

Buddhism Bukkyo Kyohan to evaluate the contemporary significance of *Chiao-hsiang p'an-shih* (教相判釈 or “a systematic classification of Buddhist doctrines on critical interpretation”) as a means of clarifying transcultural Buddhist spirituality.

The fourth section, “Buddhist critical spirituality and contemporary world”, consists of four articles: 12 “Buddhist critical spirituality in India and the world today,” 13 “Kuan-yin Bodhisattva cult and Amitābha Buddha,” 14 “Natural law as basis of communication between theistic religions and non-theistic Buddhism”. 15 “Buddha-dharma and natural law towards a trans-cultural universal ethics”.

The twelfth article seems to be a composite of article three and ten. Ichikawa focuses once again on the essential distinction between Buddhist critical spirituality and the religious nature of Hinduism, a distinction which has been passed over by Indian scholars, and in the process introduces the *dhātu-vāda* theory, which has appeared in a contemporary movement of “Critical Buddhism” (批判仏教) in Japan. The thirteenth article deals with the essential nature of the Chinese Kuan-yin Cult, and also refers to the nature of the Chinese Pure Land Cult, which, Ichimura argues, can be regarded as a manifestation of Buddhist critical spirituality. As in the first and third articles, Ichimura takes this opportunity to criticize Lokesh Chandra’s approach to the topic. The fourteenth article attempts to propose a transcultural theoretical foundation, based on Buddhist critical insight into logic and language, for the purpose of enabling proper communication between different religious traditions. The fifteenth article reviews the meaning of the Buddhist Dharma, with a focus on Nāgārjuna’s dual truth theory as the basis for the future establishment of a set of trans-cultural universal ethics. Ichimura concludes:

Śākyamuni set forth the saint path *Śrāvaka-yāna* of Arhat-hood, striving upon the ever upward path that is the path of mental purification. In this context, Nāgārjuna’s dialectical method analyzes the logico-linguistic route of the mind saturated with a particular cultural perspective and allows for purification of pre-linguistic route of neural programming. The intent is not to prepare the way for another particular cultural form, but to liberate us from all forms of cultures. This transformation can be understood more clearly when seen within the Indian social and cultural context. Later, Buddhism introduced the path of the Bodhisattva for the downward passage from transcendence into the world of convention. This ideal human type, having once achieved mental purity through the upward path and thus firmly established in freedom, is ready to adapt to any culture and convey to fellow humans that dual passage (i.e., upward and downward) dialectically linking the dual truth. (p. 387)

The author’s discussions based on his cross-cultural studies of Buddhism are much deeper and more comprehensive than I have summarized above. All those concerned with Buddhist contributions to contemporary issues should find some inspiration in this book, as Ichimura shows a Buddhist way of transcending the socio-cultural frameworks that have resulted in human conflicts.

Unfortunately, the book contains some minor errors. For example, on page

76, the middle section of the passage “(2) analyzing this principle in reference to the three recipient; (2) analyzing this principle in reference to the three motivational contexts of love and compassion;” is redundant. The entire passage should have read “(2) analyzing this principle in reference to the three motivational contexts of love and compassion;”. The Chinese characters for *Chih-i* should be 智覲 (p. 220) and for *yüan-jung-san-ti* be 円融三諦, not 緣融三諦 (p. 231). Of course, these errors do not diminish the value of *Buddhist Critical Spirituality: Prajñā and Śūnyatā* as a whole.

Finally, if I may be allowed to make a comment that is beyond the scope of the present work, I would very much like to know Ichimura’s evaluation of Japanese Kannon faith. Considering his in-depth discussion of the transcultural nature of Kuan-yin faith, an analysis of this particular phenomenon would appear to me to constitute a vital role of his research.

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