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Japanese Buddhism: A Cultural History (review)

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(Review)

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BOOK REVIEWS

Japanese Buddhism: A Cultural History. By Yoshiro Tamura. Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 2000. Pp. 232. Paper \$14.95.

Reviewed by **Steven Heine** Florida International University

Japanese Buddhism: A Cultural History is a recent English translation of a work by Yoshiro Tamura originally published in Japan in the late 1960s. Tamura, who died in 1989, was one of the most prominent scholars of Japanese Buddhist studies of his era and was probably best known for his major study of “New” Kamakura era Buddhist figures, including Shinran, Dōgen, and Nichiren. In that book Tamura executed a very sophisticated textual analysis of the often overt but sometimes subtle distinctions in doctrinal positions of the leading Kamakura Buddhist thinkers in their respective appropriations of Tendai original-enlightenment thought (*hongaku shisō*), which was a dominant ideology and a major influence on those who may have departed from or criticized its contents. Tamura’s approach to Buddhist studies, with its emphasis on analyzing the textual tradition, has perhaps been superseded for many scholars by the approaches of such figures as Kuroda Toshio, Amino Yoshihiko, and Sasaki Kaoru, who have examined medieval Buddhism from a sociohistorical perspective. Also, some of Tamura’s other writings may be questioned for espousing a standpoint that could be associated with *nihonjinron* (Japanese exceptionalism) theory by highlighting the distinctiveness of Buddhist practices in the context of the Japanese cultural tradition.

A focus in this book on Japanese cultural uniqueness for understanding Buddhism in Japan seems indicated by the subtitle and by the back-cover copy, which refers to the way “Japan’s Buddhism and the nation’s cultural matrix are so inextricably linked that it is impossible to explicate the one without understanding the other.” However, the work itself does not really delve into *nihonjinron* territory, but rather offers a conventional historical approach, with some exceptions, including chapter 4 on “The Japanese Response,” which discusses Japanese poetic expressions of Buddhist doctrine.

The contents of the book were originally published in a Kosei monthly magazine under the title “Hyakuman nin no Bukkyō-shi” (A history of Japanese Buddhism for a million readers) and then in book form by Kadokawa Shoten under the title *Nihon Bukkyō-shi nyūmon* (An introductory history of Japanese Buddhism). Since the original publication date was thirty-five years ago and the book does not represent cutting edge scholarship at this point, it can best be evaluated for its possible usefulness as a general survey in the classroom. The key question is whether this would make ideal required reading for an advanced undergraduate course on Japanese Buddhism.

The book’s main advantage is also its weakness, that is, the attempt to cover over fifteen hundred years and every major period in a little over two hundred pages. On the one hand, all of the major schools and thinkers are introduced, ranging from

pre-Nara trends through the formation of classical and medieval sects as well as early modern sociopolitical conditions to contemporary new religious movements. The book is a reliable reference guide that offers a snapshot of important events, leading figures, and doctrinal themes in a way that is evenhanded and objective, including the explanation of Nichirenist new movements such as Risshō Kōsei-kai. For that reason it can be highly recommended.

On a close reading, however, the deficiency of this approach becomes clear. For example, chapter 3 dealing with the development of early Buddhist temples in Japan tries to show a progression from Asuka-dera through Shitennō-ji and Hōryū-ji to Yakushi-ji, but the discussion in the narrative does not sufficiently flesh out what the diagram on page 41 is trying to illustrate about unfolding trends in iconography and scriptural exegetical studies.

Also, the sections on such topics as Eizon and the revival of the Ritsu school during the Kamakura era and the role of the *danka* system in the Tokugawa era are a bit confusing and misleading in their brevity. Page 93 in chapter 8 on “The Founders of Kamakura Buddhism” refers to a “definite philosophical development” between the teachings of Hōnen, Nōnin, and Eisai, in the late twelfth century, and the thirteenth-century founders of new Buddhist sects, but this key point is never clearly explained. Nevertheless, keeping these limitations in mind, *Japanese Buddhism* should make a significant contribution to much-needed instructional materials in the field.

A Companion to Angus C. Graham's Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters. By Harold D. Roth. Monographs of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, 20. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003. Pp. 243. Paper \$18.00.

Reviewed by **Steve Coutinho** Towson University

Scholars of Chuang Tzu—and “children of Angus”—will enthusiastically welcome Harold Roth's *A Companion to Angus C. Graham's Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, a collection of A. C. Graham's scholarly studies of the *Chuang Tzu*. Thanks to Roth's concerted efforts, Graham's scholarship on the *Chuang Tzu* has now been made readily available in a single volume. A. C. Graham was one of the most distinguished Western scholars of classical Chinese philosophy and one of the leading interpreters of the philosophy of Chuang Tzu. His pioneering research—textual, linguistic, and philosophical—on the *Chuang Tzu* and on its philosophical predecessor, the *Later Mohist Canon*, have laid the scholarly groundwork for further explorations of this philosophical and literary masterpiece.

This collection includes: Graham's “Textual Notes to *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*,” first published as a scholarly monograph in 1982 as a supplement to the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, under the title “Chuang-tzu: Textual Notes to a Partial Translation”; “How Much of *Chuang Tzu* Did Chuang Tzu Write?” which first appeared in 1976 in the *Journal of the American Academy of Re-*