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Bouddhismes, philosophies et religions. By Bernard Faure, Flammarion, 1998, 285 pages, ISBN: 2080355201, 110,00 FF (US \$15.00).

Reviewed by

Francis Brassard
Lecturer in Religious Studies
McGill University
cyfb@musica.mcgill.ca

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The title of this book was originally meant to be *À travers champs* (through the fields), but the metaphor was believed to be too abstract, that is, commercially inappropriate (p. 79). This is unfortunate because the present title is rather misleading: one would expect a survey of the different Buddhist traditions and their respective doctrines and spiritual practices, but instead what the reader finds in Faure's book is a discussion of the different ways Buddhism was and is understood in the West. As such, the original title, which refers to the Ch'an Master Yunmen's striking at old stumps in the fields, would have been more appropriate. *Bouddhismes, philosophies et religions* starts with a warning against the various Buddhism(s) in fashion. It also challenges the different conceptual antinomies of European thinking such as "Faith and Reason" or "Idealism and Materialism" that are often used as conceptual tools for one's understanding of Buddhist religion and philosophy. This book, however, goes a little bit further than just striking at old stumps: on the one hand, it seeks to identify the elements of the Western ways of thinking that would render more accessible certain aspects of the Buddhist tradition, and on the other hand it tries to see whether certain Buddhist notions may help us reformulate a few of the classical problems of Western philosophy (p. 8). For Faure, one of these Buddhist notions is the doctrine of Two Truths. In this regard, the author joins with other commentators who have already attempted to bridge the gap between the East and the West by promoting a specific Buddhist doctrine.

The strength of Faure's book is without doubt its analysis of the preconceived ideas (*idées reçues*) on Buddhism. For example, when discussing whether Buddhism is a pacific religion (p. 30), the author, without denying the importance of its ideas of tolerance and compassion, questions Walpola Rahula's affirmation concerning the 2500 years of Buddhist history during which a drop of blood was never spilled. Contrary to what is usually said, Faure shows that the relations between Buddhism and war were in fact quite complex throughout its history. He also questions the attempt to assimilate Buddhism to a kind of atheistic humanism (p. 31). According to Faure, this is one of the most common misconceptions about Buddhism. He quite convincingly shows that this idea may be rooted in European colonial history, that is, in an attempt to discredit the Buddhists by showing that they have misunderstood their own "philosophical" tradition and consequently, that they should be ruled by those who can really understand it!

Faure's analysis also touches at more contemporary issues in the field of Buddhist studies, namely, whether it is possible to dissociate Buddhism as it is practiced by those who identify themselves as Buddhists from the

Buddhism of the texts. In this regard, the author says that an objective study of the Buddhist philosophical and religious traditions should not shy away from elements that may shock the Western rational mind (p. 110). For Buddhist scholars, some issues discussed by Faure are not really new. The intended audience seems then to be people who have been exposed to Buddhism but who have not really questioned or put into perspective what is said about it. Someone, for example, who has heard or read the Dalai Lama, but who is not aware that the belief in reincarnation is especially significant in the Tibetan context (p. 29), or someone, who, on the basis of certain accounts of Buddhism, still considers the Mahāyāna Buddhist ideal to be superior to that of the Hīnayāna Buddhists. Despite the intended audience of Faure's book, I think that the specialists of Buddhism may still find some interest in it. In his attempt to bridge a gap between Eastern and the Western ways of thinking, Faure might be doing, from one point of view, something valuable, but from another, something critical. His use of the doctrine of Two Truths to solve some of the Western classical problems is comparable to Michael Pye's appropriation of the notion of Skillful Means (*upāya*) to smooth out some of the absolutist positions of Christianity (See "Skillful Means and the Interpretation of Christianity," in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 10, pp. 37-41).

Such an attempt to graft a doctrine from a specific tradition into an alien one may be criticized from two sides. Firstly, the doctrine that is to be grafted has to be simplified; that is, it is often presented in a way that overlooks all the various interpretations and assumptions inherent to that doctrine within its tradition of origin. Here, Faure tends to offer us an interpretation of the doctrine of the Two Truths that reflects especially the Tibetan and the Chinese positions (pp. 195-219).

Secondly, if a doctrine serves a specific purpose in the tradition in which it has been developed, is that purpose relevant to the host tradition? Implicitly, while bringing in a new doctrine, does one also carry along its most fundamental presuppositions? In other words, if one tries to solve a problem specific to a Western world view with an idea from the East, does one, in effect, do Eastern philosophy with Western concepts? On the other hand, and despite the above warning, Faure's book can be seen as an inevitable event: when two different cultures come into contact, some degree of mutual borrowing is bound to occur. This borrowing may, however, result in the birth of many new ideas, some of which may be totally unrecognizable, or rather, illegitimate. The merit of *Bouddhismes, philosophies et religions* is therefore to prepare the ground for a healthy exchange by exposing a few of the false claims of legitimacy with regards to one's current views about Buddhism.

Faure's suggestion that the doctrine of Two Truths may smooth out a few of the hard edges of Western philosophy, and possibly theology, may not be readily accepted, especially by the Western philosophers and theologians, but it remains an honest and well-grounded attempt to open up a dialogue and, one hopes, a cross-breeding between the Western and Eastern cultures.