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Two Recent Works on Japanese Buddhism and Comparative Philosophical Studies: *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism*. By Steve Odin. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. Pp. xvi, 482. ISBN: 0-7914-2492-8 (paperback), \$24.95; and *Working Emptiness: Toward a Third Reading of Emptiness in Buddhism and Postmodern Thought*. By Newman Robert Glass. Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995. Pp. ix, 146. ISBN: 0-7885-0080-5 (cloth), \$38.95; ISBN: 0-7885-0081-3 (paperback), \$25.95.

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For well over a decade a dominant trend in Buddhist studies has been a movement away from comparative philosophical studies and toward historical studies. The method of historical studies has been variously understood as emphasizing either the textual history of Buddhist writings in their different redactions, thereby stressing the use of philology and literary criticism, or the contextual history of Buddhist institutions and their impact on society and popular culture, thereby stressing the use of social scientific methodologies. In either case, historical studies emphasize the need to carefully situate expressions of Buddhist thought against the background of the textual and social forces that have influenced and determined their formation and development. The main criticism leveled by the historical studies approach is that comparative philosophy may tend to be ahistorical and decontextual. It thereby gives a misleading and idealized impression of Buddhist thought by conflating sectarian polemics with truth-claims, for example, or by mistaking bids for patronage and political power for metaphysical arguments shorn of historical contingencies. In other words, for historians, philosophers may uncritically accept what the tradition, or some traditional sources taken out of context, says about itself without a proper analysis of the roots and consequences of its diverse levels of discourse.

These two books help resuscitate the comparative philosophical approach by critically examining sources of the Buddhist tradition, particularly Japanese Zen, in light of a juxtaposition with appropriately corresponding examples of Western thought—for Odin this involves a comparison of modern Japanese philosophers representing the Kyoto School and American philosophers in the school of pragmatism, particularly George Herbert Mead; and for Glass this involves a comparison of medieval and modern Zen thinkers such as Dōgen and Nishitani Keiji and modern Western exponents of poststructuralism, phenomenology and deconstructionism, including Martin Heidegger and Mark Taylor. Both Odin and Glass effectively construct and critique Japanese philosophers from the standpoint of raising basic ethical questions about the role of Buddhist thought in the modern world that have been brought to light by the association of the history of religious ideas and ideals in twentieth-century Japan with nationalist or imperialist agendas.

In comparing the two works, Odin's proves much more successful in terms of organization, clarity, familiarity with source materials, depth of comparison, awareness of historical context, and use of critical methodology. His book is the product of a scholar who has obviously spent years thoroughly researching both the Eastern and Western poles of the topic and stands at the peak of his ability to offer critical insight coupled with cogent

writing skills. Glass's work suffers from a repetitiveness that in a slim volume suggests a lack of clear organization or of a reading of original language sources. Nevertheless, his book does a commendable job of relentlessly pursuing in contemplative philosophical fashion a sophisticated theoretical discussion of the doctrine of emptiness in a way that challenges the easy assumptions of many interpreters. Both authors use the comparative philosophical approach to their advantage, though Odin is better able to integrate this methodology with a firm grasp of Japanese and American intellectual history whereas Glass is less capable of offsetting the potential objections of textual or social historians.

The works of Odin and Glass have much in common and yet also display many points of divergence, and many of the similarities and discrepancies are evident in their choices of cover art. Both books use a drawing selected from the traditional series of the Ten Oxherding Pictures attributed to twelfth-century Rinzai master Kuo-an Shih-yuan. Odin has chosen the final picture in the sequence, which shows the boy who, having tamed the ox and returned from a realm of primordial nothingness, is now entering into the marketplace, thereby unifying ultimate and mundane reality, or nirvana and samsara. This entrance, or re-entrance, into concrete experience after having apparently fully transcended it exemplifies Odin's focus on the social side of Japanese Buddhism. For Odin, the key to Zen is not meditation in a manner that remains detached and isolated from society but a realization articulated by modern philosophers that is firmly rooted in a sense of "betweenness" (*aidagara* or *ma*, in Watsuji Tetsurō) or the "place" or topos (*basho*, in Nishida Kitarō) of intersubjectivity. According to Odin, the Ten Oxherding Pictures "illustrating the Zen process of becoming a person culminates with the realization of the true self as a compassionate Bodhisattva located in the *between* of I and Thou as the standpoint of Nothingness. . . . [this] thereby makes fully explicit that the goal of Zen is not simply an inner state of tranquillity but the social reconstruction of the self" (453). Therefore, Odin's choice of the last picture implies not a sense of completeness or finality but of an ever continuing process of becoming within the social realm. Yet Odin is wary of the facile or biased nature of some of the arguments for social selfhood in Japanese philosophy, which tend to lead to an overemphasis on the value of loyalty to the group as an end in itself or to a communitarianism such that the "odd nail gets hammered into place" (*deru kugi wa utareru*). Odin consistently cites criticisms of the Kyoto school from non-Buddhists in the postwar period such as Maruyama Masao as well as Western skeptics such as Peter Dale who has sought to expose *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (New York: St. Martins, 1986). However, Odin does not follow through with this line of

criticism to the extent seen in the recent collection of articles presented at a symposium on modern Japanese intellectual history and the prewar/postwar period, *Rude Awakenings*, ed. James Heisig and Jim Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

Glass's cover is a picture taken from the middle of the series in which the boy has just tamed the ox, signifying that he has reached the opening stages of attaining transcendence but has not yet moved on to an realization of absolute nothingness or a triumphant return to the mundane realm of immanence. This picture is a persuasive metaphor for the purposeful conceptual struggling Glass undertakes in encountering what he identifies as two visions of emptiness—one based on presence or being and the other on absence or nonbeing. Glass argues that the “disagreement over the nature and function of emptiness in thinking, a disagreement which fails to engage what is primary” (107) points to a problematic in some traditional conceptions of the central doctrine of Buddhism. This is resolvable, however, through understanding how postmodern thought points to a third possibility which has always been available but is often left unrecognized in Zen thought, which Glass refers to in somewhat controversial fashion as “essence,” or an emotional response to conditioned reality beyond conventional thinking. Like Odin, Glass is also aware of the possible misuses and abuses of Buddhism leading either to antinomian or fascist associations, and he briefly cites the social/ethical issues raised by the recent Critical Buddhism (*hihan bukkyō*) methodology. Glass writes with a consequent sense of urgency and at times even a kind of passion that at once contrasts with Odin's measured, objective tone and converges with his voice in creating a sense of unfolding a deeper philosophical significance that in the end relativizes ethical concerns. Both authors seek to show that they have identified and penetrated to a basic level of truth that lies at the foundation of ethical thought and behavior through a comparative philosophy methodology.

Odin's book is structured in three parts: the first deals with Japanese philosophy, especially Watsuji, Nishida, and psychologist Doi Takeo; the second part deals with American pragmatism and demonstrates how Mead, often an overlooked figure, is the culmination of a movement including Peirce, James, Royce, Cooley, Dewey, and Whitehead (and more recently Buchler and Hartshorne); and the third part focuses on the relative strengths and weakness of each camp. The sequence of the volume moves smoothly from interpreting Watsuji's critique of Heidegger's notion of temporality from the perspective of a new emphasis on spatiality to the argument that Mead surpasses the Kyoto school because he has stripped away the kind of the thinking that is vulnerable to charges of nefarious political associa-

tions. Odin's main thesis is beautifully summed up in the following passage:

Like Mead in American pragmatism, Nishida Kitarō develops an explicit theory of the social self based on an I-Other dialectic which overcomes Cartesian subjectivism while preserving the "I" of creative human agency and the acting self. Similar to the I-Me dialectic of Mead, the I-Thou dialectic of Nishida underscores the irreducible self-creativity and radical discontinuity of the individual I as over against the social determinism of the "Thou." However, at the political levels of analysis, it has been seen that whereas the social self and I-Thou dialectic of Nishida is used to support the emperor system, the social self and I-Me dialectic of Mead instead functions as the basis for a liberal democratic society (39).

One of the strengths here is Odin's ability to clarify the fascinating and complex intellectual historical context in terms of the reception of American pragmatism in turn-of-the-century Japan, including the profound influence exerted by William James on Nishida, as well as the reception of Japanese thought in the same time frame by American philosophers who were reading works such as Nitobe Inazō's commentary written in English on the samurai ethic. Yet, despite his sympathetic understanding of Japanese thought, Odin reverses the outlook of many comparativists who favor the East in his conclusion that "only the Whiteheadian process framework of G. H. Mead clarifies the *asymmetrical* nature of these relations so as to allow for both individuality and sociality, creativity and contextuality, indeterminacy and determinacy" (437).

Glass's volume opens with an introduction that explains two views of emptiness that are prevalent in traditional Zen thought as well as in diverse currents of postmodern philosophy. These views are discussed more fully in the subsequent chapters: the notion of presence, being, or "co-dependent arising," which functions through Heideggerian categories of thinking, seeing, and saying that disclose the Lighting, Clearing, or Fourfold of authentic existence; and the notion of absence, difference, or "dependent arising," which is understood in terms of the gaps, cuts, tears, or invisible, blank spaces of experience as discussed in Taylor's articulation of Derrida's *différance*. According to Glass, the impasse between presence and absence can be resolved by a third working of emptiness or essence revealed in *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as well as in Dōgen's explanation of the enlightenment experience of the casting off of body-mind (*shinjin datsuraku*). On this level, "(m)editation works in the space between stimulus and response: it opens and explores the gap between thought and action" (80). In some

ways, Glass's notion of the field experience of essential meditation is quite similar to Odin's emphasis on the mutually communicative intersubjectivity of the social self. Yet, the question remains whether Glass has generated a novel reading or has recast the "threefold logic" of the traditional Zen passage, "the mountain is a mountain before practice, it is not a mountain after practice, and it is again a mountain after practice." Furthermore, the reader may feel that Glass's understanding of the relation between *Tathāgathagarbha* theory and Dōgen's form of practice should be better grounded in the kind of textual historical study exemplified by William Grosnick's "The Zen Master Dōgen's Understanding of the Buddha-nature in Light of the Historical Development of the Concept in India, China, and Japan" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1979). Without such a contextualized framework, the tendency to an ahistorical idealization is more difficult to keep in check.

In conclusion, Odin's work will no doubt become the standard for future studies of American philosophy and Eastern thought; it is a volume that can be used by specialists in either field in addition to comparativists. Glass's work may have a more limited impact, but it is a stimulating and challenging philosophical reflection that can inspire a rethinking of some basic assumptions about Zen.