

BOOK REVIEWS

Lopez, Donald S., Jr. *Hyecho's Journey: The World of Buddhism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2017. 245 pp. (ISBN-13: 9780226517902 [Hardcover])

This beautifully produced book, a result of the collaborative effort of a scholarly team lead by Donald Lopez, the Arthur E. Link Distinguished University Professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies at the University of Michigan, captures the reader's attention almost immediately with a claim of being "a different kind of book about Buddhism: in its scope, in its content, in its method, and in how it was made." Departing from this point, and journeying into the text, the reader soon becomes captivated by the creative approach presented in *Hyecho's Journey: The World of Buddhism*.

Hyecho (ca. 700-ca. 780), a Korean monk who travelled from Korea to China, India, Central Asia and back to China, visiting Buddhist sites throughout Asia and reaching as far west as Arabia, is the protagonist of the story. His travel journal, available in fragments but covering a period of approximately three years, becomes the pretext for taking the reader through a carefully controlled "exercise in imagination." In this way, the recapitulation of a single monk's journey, combined with the author's imagination, provides a detailed in-depth introduction to Buddhist thought as well as the principles of Buddhist art. This distinctive approach of zooming in on the events from Hyecho's *Memoirs of a Pilgrimage to the Five Indian Kingdoms* entirely contradicts the somewhat coquettish statement made in the introduction suggesting that "instead of covering twenty-five hundred years the book would focus only on the three year period of 724-727 CE." Also, it provides the reader with a rare chance to, somewhat effortlessly, enter into the spatial structure of the systematically and tightly woven matter of Buddhist doctrine, and to travel through various lands and different centuries.

The book is also structured in a manner which, in relation to most of the known studies on Buddhism, could be described as unique or, at least, unusual. Nevertheless, it opens with an introduction which provides a fair yet highly synthetic account of the foundations of the Buddhist tradition, as well as an outline of Hyecho's biography, and a detailed account of his journey, compiled on the basis of the remaining fragments of his diary. It also candidly explains the apparent insignificance of Hyecho's diary among Buddhist accounts on pilgrimages to

India, such as the ones produced by Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing. However, it also points out the freshness of Hyecho's approach, the remarkably young age at which he began his travels, and the amazing geographical extent of his journey. Overall, the introduction together with the bibliographic note and the list of further reading provided at the end of each chapter shall quench the thirst of all who would seek in this book a primarily scholarly approach, which, appearances apart, can be seen throughout the entire text.

The twelve autonomous chapters which follow the introduction are, as the author claims, "admittedly speculative." However, the "speculations" rest on a solid ground of scholarship, and are supported by decades and volumes of studies of Buddhist doctrine, bringing a synthesis of long-standing academic discussions over many unsettled issues, for example, the mode of portraying the Buddha in a symbolic or figurative manner, the credibility of both Lumbinī as the place of Buddha's birth and Kuśinagara, where he is believed to have attained nirvāṇa, as well as the relationship between Buddhism and Islam in South Asia and the possible effects of their encounter. Also, each chapter provides references to the texts of earlier travel accounts by Buddhist monks who travelled from China to India, as well as frequent, detailed references to the state of research, presented in a most attractive and, at the same time, entirely efficient manner.

The primary concept of the book is the notion of pilgrimage, explained in the Buddha's deathbed words, where he instructs his followers to visit four places of special meaning: Lumbinī where he was born, Bodh Gayā where he attained enlightenment, Sarnath where he gave his first sermon, and Kuśinagara where he departed from this world. However, just like its protagonist the travelling monk, the book takes the reader also to other locations, other important places in the world of Buddhism, such as the vicinity of Rājagṛha, as well as Śrāvastī and Vārāṇasī. The chronology of the reader's travel through the text follows the map of Hyecho's travels, not the sequence of events in the Buddha's life, adding to the map of the world of Buddhism Dunhuang as the departure point of Hyecho's journey and Wutaishan as his final destination. Each chapter comprises three parts, opening with a story connected to some aspect of a place visited by Hyecho, followed by a commentary rich in scholarly data as well as bringing some inducement to the reader's imagination, and concluding with an inspiring analysis of two art works, always in some way connected to the place which Hyecho visited. Even though each chapter constitutes an integral entirety, interconnecting references to other chapters are also provided for those who wish to follow the route from beginning to end.

The three-fold structure of each chapter resembles one of the traditional *jātaka* stories, constructed as frame-tales in which the Buddha, appearing in his present life and usually while speaking to monks about the issues regarding the monastery, provides the frame. Then, the Buddha tells a story of his past life. When the Buddha finishes telling the story of the past, the reader returns to the present, and the Buddha provides an interpretation of the story. This interpretation reveals the connection between the frame-tale and the story. And,

Just as the *jātaka* tales maintain a careful balance between locality and universality, as well as the past, the present and the future, the author of the book also admits to making an attempt to transcend the boundaries of time and space.

In *Hyecho's Journey: The World of Buddhism*, the connection between the frame-tale and the story is additionally sustained by concluding each chapter with the meticulous portrayal of two masterpieces of Buddhist art. The selection of the twenty-four art works was made from the Freer and Sackler collections, partly from the 2017 exhibition "Encountering the Buddha: Art and Practice Across Asia," organised at the Freer and Sackler galleries in Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian's galleries of Asian art. This part of each chapter most certainly deserves special attention, for all the twenty-four careful analyses, dwelling also on possible associations to Hyecho's journey, stimulate the reader's imagination and help him or her to fully participate both in the journey of Hyecho and in their own travels through the world of Buddhism.

All in all, it is indeed the world of Buddhism presented through the prism of Hyecho's journey out of which light is shed concentrically on the subsequent circles of Buddhist thought and art. The reader is provided with a unique opportunity to engage his or her own imagination and become a part of the journey of the eighth century Korean Buddhist monk, accompanied not only by the findings of extensive academic research, but also by the researcher's rare creativity, the role of which in this study can never be stressed enough.

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