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(mostly successful) attempts of nineteenth-century missionaries to create Catholic communities isolated from “heathenism,” privileged in the British-administered colony, and controlled by Rome through the priesthood. He then demonstrates that both global and local factors—Vatican II, Buddhist nationalism, economic dislocation—have transformed these communities too radically and quickly, en-gendering fragmentation and uncertainty throughout Catholic Sri Lanka.

Stirrat explains Kudagama’s rise as a response to this fragmentation, arguing that demonic possession at shrines like Kudagama reflects the entire community’s experience as a displaced minority within Buddhist Sri Lanka, as well as to debates over power and authority at the individual level, especially within households (advancing a novel perspective on the prominence of young women in possession cults); he also relates contemporary Catholic valuations of suffering and sacrifice to power struggles at every level. But Stirrat proceeds self-critically to insist that Kudagama is not representative; it is but one dimension of a larger “entropic process within the Sri Lankan Church” producing ever more diversity (p. 149).

Two final chapters compare these developments with wider trends in Sinhala society, blurring distinctions between “Catholicism” and “Buddhism.” Stirrat suggests that the new prominence of Skanda and other powerful gods among Buddhists, like the Catholic developments, should be understood in relation to changing political models (contra Gananath Obeyesekere’s psychologic interpretation). He then examines additional “fringe” developments that are moving contemporary Sinhala Catholicism, in his view, ever closer to Buddhism and Hinduism. Stirrat’s conclusion drives home the dynamism of Sinhala Catholicism, “a continual process of teaching, accommodation and rejection in which forms of religious practice were and continue to be developed, reproduced and transformed” (p. 196), while addressing general theoretical points to the wider scholarly community.

This book, rich with detail, will be welcomed by specialists and can be recommended to all religionists and anthropologists interested in a provocative analysis of power in religious formation, the primacy of practice, the inapplicability of religion/politics dichotomies, the dangers of essentializing “culture” or “religion” (or any religious community), competition in multireligious societies, and the interplay of global and local factors in fostering religious change.

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The Japanese Zen monk Myōchō (1282–1337), better known by his honorary name Daitō Kokushi, is a cardinal figure in the medieval Japanese Zen patriarchy. A monk of prodigious learning and literary talent, Daitō rose to a position of considerable eminence, enjoying the patronage of two retired emperors. This patronage made it possible for Daitō to establish Daitokuji monastery, later to become a pillar of the Rinzai Zen establishment. These accomplishments are all the more remarkable considering that, unlike the founders of other important monastic centers of his day, Daitō never traveled to the continent to study under a Chinese master.

*Eloquent Zen* is the first full-length study of Daitō’s life and literary legacy in English, but it is also more than that. The book includes an engaging description

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of the political, cultural, and social milieu in which Daitō lived and worked and is the first English study to provide a detailed discussion of Zen “capping phrases”—short prosimetric glosses to koans which developed into a sophisticated form of interlinear commentary writing. Indeed, Daitō can take credit for both popularizing and refining the art of capping phrases which was later to assume an important role in formal koan training.

Along the way, Eloquent Zen manages to dispel some of the ubiquitous myths about Zen, notably the notion that Zen literally eschews words and language. The book vigorously attests to the pivotal role placed on literary skill and accomplishment in the medieval Zen world. Daitō was nothing if not a man of letters, and his writings, which abound in metaphors and allusions drawn from Buddhist and non-Buddhist Chinese sources, bear eloquent testimony to Daitō’s enormous erudition. (Indeed, the “obscurity” and “inscrutability” often attributed to Zen writings is merely an indication that they were intended for an educated elite and presume familiarity with a vast and sophisticated literary canon.) Although Kenneth Kraft occasionally falls prey to contemporary apologetics, such as when he claims that Zen “eloquence” often seeks to transform “by disrupting rational thought and defying conventional language” (pp. 151–52), his own analysis belies such a view: Kraft himself is willing and able to unpack the symbolic, metaphoric, and doctrinal significance of various koans and capping phrases found in Daitō’s corpus.

Eloquent Zen falls somewhere between the more technical studies on Zen that have appeared in recent years—works in which philological focus often renders them inaccessible to nonspecialists—and the steady flow of uncritical popularizations of “Zen thought” that tend blithely to ignore the findings of critical scholarship. Kraft’s book, while clearly scholarly, manages to remain lucid and free of jargon. Unfortunately, one of the book’s strengths—its captivating narrative—is also one of its weaknesses. Kraft skillfully weaves a seamless tapestry out of the fragmentary and often unreliable records bearing on the “life and times” of Daitō, creating an engaging and eminently readable account. However as Kraft is quick to point out, the few reliable sources on Daitō offer little more than a vague shadow of the real historical personage, and many of the best-known legends surrounding Daitō’s life, such as those pertaining to his years living in obscurity with beggars under the Gojō Bridge, are largely apocryphal. As such, Kraft is forced to rely on problematic, relatively late, and often partisan sources to fill the gaps. While Kraft is usually quick to alert the reader to potential problems and biases in his sources, his desire to create a coherent narrative often leads him to reproduce the idealized and mythologized Daitō of later Zen tradition. (In this connection, note that Kraft tends to present koan exchanges as if they were records of actual encounters, rather than literary fictions, and neglects to warn his readers that anecdotes pertaining to the lives of many T’ang masters are little more than legend and myth.)

Given the unfortunate fact that the Daitō of history may well be lost to us (a fact that Kraft is the first to admit), Kraft has performed a worthy service in presenting the Daitō of tradition, doing his best to provide the relevant historical and cultural context out of which our sources emerge. Kraft provides a sensitive and perspicacious analysis of a sampling of Daitō’s writings along with a valuable introduction to Zen capping phrases. Eloquent Zen is a welcome addition to Zen scholarship, accessible enough to recommend for use in undergraduate teaching.

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