

## Brief Reviews

*Illusory Abiding: The Cultural Construction of the Chan Monk Zhongfeng Mingben.* By NATASHA HELLER. Harvard East Asian Monographs, vol. 368. Cambridge, Mass.: HARVARD UNIV. ASIA CENTER, HARVARD UNIV. PRESS, 2014. Pp. xiv + 471. \$49.95.

The book's title tells us three things: One, *Illusory Abiding* (*huanzhu* 幻住) is Zhongfeng Mingben's appellation for his retreat. Two, *Cultural Construction* is the theoretical framework on which Heller bases her work. Three, *the Chan Monk Zhongfeng Mingben* refers to the influential Buddhist monk of the Yuan period, Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本 (1263–1323). On the inside flap, the book is described as a “monograph which offers a cultural history of Buddhism through a case study.” This is precisely what this book does.

Divided into eight chapters, this monograph elaborates on core issues of Mingben's life and teaching. Chapter one discusses his biographies. Chapter two is about Mount Tianmu where the monk spent most of his life and his patronage networks in that area. Chapter three traces the Chan master's practices of reclusion and asceticism through his frequent movements. Chapter four situates Mingben's code *Rules of Purity for the Cloister of Illusory Abiding* 幻住庵清規 into the context of monasteries as organized Buddhist institutions. Chapter five illuminates the monk's understanding of Chan lineage and positions him in these genealogies. Chapter six highlights the importance of the master's advocacy of the use of “critical phrases” (*huatou* 話頭) in religious practice. Chapter seven focusses on the erudite monk's poetry, specifically poems on plum blossoms, and on his literary relationship with the calligrapher and poet Feng Zizhen. Chapter eight turns away from purely textual sources and instead looks at portraits of and calligraphies by Zhongfeng Mingben.

Natasha Heller covers an enormous wealth of material. In this, her book differs from earlier publications on Mingben, which mostly concentrate on certain aspects of his life. All source texts are provided in Chinese within the flowing text with her excellent annotated translations. Not putting the source texts into appendices saves the reader the trouble of constantly flipping pages. One of the strong points of the book is Heller's minutely detailed delineation of Mingben's social network, including his relationships with patrons, other monks, lay Buddhists, and literati. This approach offers a wider and more complex picture than simply presenting the Chan master as an isolated individual. In short, Heller has managed most successfully to describe and interpret the cultural and social context of which Mingben was an active participant.

Occasionally, it would have been enlightening for the less informed reader had a few more words been said about some not so well known people. For example, a certain Guanding 灌頂 (561–632) is briefly mentioned on p. 28, citing a secondary source (Shinohara Koi-chi), and then again on p. 223, citing another secondary source (Linda Penkower). Guanding was a monk of the Tiantai school of Buddhism, who had written down many of the teachings of his master Zhiyi (538–597).

In some instances, a more critical questioning of the occasionally problematic material history of the manuscripts discussed might have been desirable. For example, the epitaph for Faru 法如 (638–689), mentioned on p. 223, is such a problematic text. Its words were incised into a funerary stele at the Shaolin monastery after the monk's death. Then rubbings were taken from that stele. In 1967, Yanagida Seizan published an edited version of a rubbing. Since the original stone stele seems to be no longer extant, it should explicitly be made clear that the transmission of this text is at least problematic, considering the multiple opportunities to manipulate the text when a change of media took place (manuscript, stele, rubbing, edition of the rubbing, quotation of portions of the texts in other texts).

The emphasis of Heller's book is on explaining various aspects of Zhongfeng Mingben's Buddhist beliefs and practices but not exclusively so. It is one of the great merits of Heller's scholarly work that she breaks down the barriers between established disciplines and through combining approaches from the fields of philology, classical literature, history, sociology, Buddhist studies, and art history, she achieves a clear, enlightening, and differentiated picture of the illustrious monk. The constructivist framework certainly helps to organize the rich material, but it does sometimes seem a bit forced.

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*The Drunken Man's Talk: Tales from Medieval China.*

By LUO YE. Translated by ALISTER D. INGLIS. Seattle: UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON PRESS, 2015. Pp. xxiii + 214. \$50 (cloth); \$30 (paper).

Since its discovery in Japan in the 1940s, Luo Ye's *The Drunken Man's Talk* (Zuiweng tanlu) has remained mostly unknown among English readers of Chinese literature. As acknowledged in the “Translator's Introduction,” this eclectic collection of short stories compiled