James Baskind and Richard Bowring, eds.

The Myōtei Dialogues: A Japanese Christian Critique of Native Traditions. Leiden, Boston: Brill. Pp. x + 214. Hb, 104 euros.

The Myōtei Dialogues (1605), written by a star Japanese Jesuit who later apostatized and wrote the anti-Christian treatise *Deus Destroyed* (1620), is a crowning achievement of the Jesuit mission to Japan and an unjustly neglected landmark in world intellectual history. Accordingly, the publication of this English translation is an event worthy of celebration—not only because it is the first but because it is very good. It expresses an accurate understanding of the piece's dizzying range of Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, Shintō, and Christian references in a smooth style which wears its erudition lightly.

It is therefore somewhat incongruous that the translators have scattered original terms across their main text, since anyone seriously interested in them will want to consult the full original, which is readily available in a reputable critical edition and in a photographic edition for the Buddhism section. Nevertheless, I applaud the choice to provide these simply as Han graphs 漢字 and to dispense with the usual lists of phonetic glosses for various Asian languages, which are tedious, inevitably incomplete, and superfluous for anyone who actually knows the terms, no matter what language they learned them in. The Sanskrit seed syllable 𑖀: *hriḥ* is missing its *visarga* dots (thus reading only *hri*, 110), and British colloquialisms are sometimes opaque (e.g. “the time I have wasted getting fobbed off,” 106), but otherwise the translation shows a high level of accuracy, consistency, and polish.

I have not yet named the author of these dialogues because even in his name he embodies the incipient clashes and embryonic identities of his age, as well as the few shortcomings which this translation volume has. His name is spelled “Fucan Fabian” in his salutation to the preface of a Roman-script, Japanese-language book which he single-handedly authored and in whose printing he was involved (*Feiqe no Monogatari* [Amakusa, 1592], 4), but our translators spell it “Habian” as if it were a Japanese name that they have Romanized. What could possibly justify this ethnic marking, even when writing in a European language, of a European name which someone has chosen for himself and uses without exception—even though they have no problem converting 涅槃 (Ch. *Niepan*, J. *Nehan*) to (Skt.) *nirvāṇa*, etc.? They are following Kiri Paramore, who in a perverse moment in an otherwise great monograph insists on this spelling based on a misunderstanding of Japanese phonology, an overvaluation of Japanese-script sources which are almost certainly posthumous, and an apparent ignorance of the above-mentioned salutation (Paramore

2009, ch. 1, note 2). If “Habian” is the new norm, then someone had better tell Pope Francis that he needs to beatify Takayama Ukon “Jusuto.” If anything, one might modernize the Japanese morphemes, yielding “Fukan Fabian.”

Modern understanding of the Japanese Jesuit mission as a whole remains haunted by intertwining essentialisms of nation and religion, and the translators have not improved this situation with their reference in the subtitle to “native traditions” or their appraisal of Fabian in terms of his status as “a Japanese Jesuit as opposed to a missionary” (4). A desire among popular writers to rehabilitate early modern Japanese Christians as good Japanese subjects has led, for example, to the tenuous claim that Fabian was an accomplished *noh* actor, and it also lies behind the claim, perpetuated in the “Introduction,” that because Fabian’s fictional character Yūtei claims to quote “secret *kōan* manuals” (密参録, *missanroku*) from the famous Zen temple of Daitokuji, Fabian must have been a Zen adept with deep ties there (5, 10, 30).

First, *kōan* or “public cases” have always been printed, distributed, and debated, and even the supposedly “secret” *missanroku* are precisely what Ikkyū Sōjun, a famous abbot of Daitokuji, criticized a rival for sharing with merchants, teamen, and warlords (even though he regularly did the same) more than a century before Fabian. Many actual Daitokuji *missanroku* have been published, so one might have proven a unique correspondence between them and Yūtei’s “secret” knowledge, but the problem is the banality of the latter: a patriarch is asked for his core teaching, and he responds with the image of the cypress in the courtyard. This is a colorful but straightforward illustration of the basic Buddhist doctrine of No-Self: as Yūtei explains twice (112, 115), you can chop up a tree and analyze it endlessly, but you will not find a non-originated tree-ness anywhere. This reference is so well-known that it is dropped without explanation into a Han-style Japanese poem about meditation already in 827, and Yūtei’s interpretation of it is featured in popular ballads about the aforementioned Ikkyū in the century before Fabian. In fact, Yūtei quotes directly from this literature (116), so it is Fabian’s immediate source, and this passage no more connects him to Daitokuji than understanding Jesus’s parable of the mustard seed makes one a Vatican insider. Rather, the desire to connect Fabian to Daitokuji reflects the nationalist prestige of Zen.

If you break apart Fukan Fabian, you will find no essence of Zen or Christianity, no Japaneseness or Europeanness among his sinews and bones. But if you read *The Myōtei Dialogues* in this excellent translation, you will join one of the first truly global thinkers who ever lived on a breathless romp

through the intellectual and religious traditions of three continents over two millennia.

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