

Paul Tillich and Asian Religions. Edited by Keith CHAN Ka-fu and William NG Yau-nang. Boston: De Gruyter, 2017. 244 pp. ISBN: 9783110494846. \$114.99, hardcover.

The late stage of Paul Tillich's thought encountered the phenomena of intensifying globalization and religious pluralism. Despite the fact that Tillich's systematic theology lacks a full-fledged theology of religions, many aspects of it have furnished valuable resources and posed appealing questions for later scholars to continue their exploration in comparative studies of religions, theologies, and philosophies.

The aim of this edited volume is to employ Tillich's thought in a variety of ways either to reflect upon Tillich's theology of religions itself or to compare Christian thought, as it is interpreted by Tillich, to Asian religions, mainly Buddhism and Confucianism. After an introductory remark on Tillich's thinking on religions and his dialogue with Japanese Buddhism, chapter two analyzes Tillich's "metalogical" methodology in connection to his more studied methodology of "correlation," and suggests ways these methodologies may influence Tillich's interreligious understanding. The chapter is followed by three meticulously devised chapters on Tillich and Buddhism. Their common focus is to test whether Tillich's understanding of religion as "ultimate concern" can be used to analyze those fundamental metaphysical ideas of Buddhism such as *Dhama*, nothingness, and emptiness. Chapter six applies Tillich's theory on religious symbols to study the origin, meaning, and efficacy of the Daoist and Buddhist symbol of "lotus-birth." Following largely the same methodology as the three chapters on Buddhism, the last four chapters introduce Confucianism as the major interlocutor of Tillich's Christian thought, focusing on varying ideas such as love, the structure of religious ethics, self-transformation, and cosmic humanity.

There are three major conclusions that readers may draw from the comparisons that the volume makes between Tillich's Christian thought and Asian religions.

Intensification. Despite the fact that the authors of the three chapters on Buddhism try hard to interpret Buddhist understandings of reality using Tillich's terms, insightful readers may become more aware of the fundamentally different metaphysical views underlying Tillich's Christian thought and Buddhist religions. For Tillich, the ultimate reality that anchors his deepest concern is God, as His creativity is construed by the tradition of Christian philosophical theology as "*creatio ex nihilo*" and reinterpreted by Tillich as the "ground of being." Since God is the ontological origin of worldly creatures, divine creation is understood here as deriving from a state of non-being, i.e., the *ouk on* (Greek), absolute type of non-being that signifies the ontological unconditionality of divine creation. However, since divine creation gives rise to all creatures, it can be simultaneously understood as the "ground of being" or Being itself, and thus transcends both the *me on* (Greek), relative type of non-being and its corresponding type of being that describes concrete existential states of cosmic beings. Nevertheless, what is central to varying schools of Buddhist thought is their understanding of the most generic feature of reality as a universal cosmic network of "co-dependent origination." Seen from a micro perspective, this idea leads to the extinction of any nondependent self that is inherent to each individual cosmic entity. Hence, the Buddhist teaching of no-self. Seen from a macro perspective, this most generic feature of reality would not be altered despite concrete traits of changing realities and limited facilities of human languages intended to describe the former. Hence, there is the teaching of emptiness and nothingness. Understood as such, Buddhist metaphysics is more comparable to Western metaphysical discourses that are not following the Christian model of *creatio ex nihilo*, such as the

metaphysics of Aristotle, Spinoza, or Hegel. It is therefore very insightful for the volume's editors to express their concern in the first chapter that (1) because there is no question into the beginning or end of the world (p. 16), and (2) because emptiness is not a grounding reality, but the reality as it is (p. 17), it would be a challenge for scholars to use Tillich's term "ultimate concern," especially its objective connotation on features of reality, to describe the Buddhist religiosity.

Accommodation. Despite these fundamentally different metaphysical views, since Buddhism sees "co-dependent origination" as the most generic feature of reality, this featured reality is susceptible to being thought over as a whole, and the thinking would accordingly share a similar tendency toward ontology as its Christian counterpart. As a result, Buddhist scholars in this volume also try to accommodate Tillich's thought within a Buddhist expression, albeit with varying degrees of success that may succumb to readers' judgment. For example, LAI Pan-Chiu asserts that *Dharma* and "emptiness," two related terms to describe the ultimate features of reality, and the "Buddha nature," which is an agential power to know and practice those features, can be seen as the Buddhist ideas of "ultimate reality" in Tillich's sense (p.62). However, compared with Buddhist scholars' efforts at accommodation, Confucian scholars contributing to this volume appear to be more at ease in arguing for the similarity of Tillich's Christian thought and Confucianism. Sometimes, the elucidated similarities are so intense that they tend to another consequence of the comparative studies in this volume, to which I now turn.

Integration. The finest chapter on this aspect is Anthony WANG Tao's comparative study on the Christian (mainly Thomas Aquinas's and Tillich's) ideas of love and their possible integration with the Confucian idea of *ren* (humaneness). After a masterly textual analysis, WANG dismisses a stereotype on the contrasting features of the Christian and Confucian conceptualizations of love, which renders the former as "impartial" and the latter as "partial." Instead, WANG concludes that "Confucianism and Christianity cannot be superficially distinguished as consanguinitism and super-consanguinitism as two distinctive types because they both incorporated consanguinity and super-consanguinity" (p. 168). Furthermore, WANG also thinks of "the integration of Confucianism and Christianity" as "a great academic task with many possibilities" (p. 168). Although WANG has not yet pursued a constructive theology on love based upon comparisons, this is definitely one possibility to which his sort of comparative scholarship can lead.

With these insightful contributions to the comparison between Tillich and Asian religions, the studies in this volume also open many avenues for further research. The following are several examples.

First, since it is shown that Confucianism may share more similarities with Tillich's thought than Buddhism, readers will be eager to learn more about the dialogue between Buddhism and Confucianism as it is inspired by Tillich's thought. These expected, yet missing, chapters on this topic are even more needed when we take into consideration that the dialogue between Buddhism and Confucianism started long before Asian scholars knew anything about Tillich. Accordingly, issues such as emptiness, no-self, the Confucian *li* (pattern-principle), *qi* (cosmic vital-energies), and their related ethical commitments, as well as other issues, have been the topic of Buddhist–Confucian debates for more than a millennium.

Second, compared with the Buddhist scholars' lengthy discussions on metaphysics, the chapters on Confucianism focus disproportionately on ethics. Keith CHAN Ka-fu's chapter on cosmic humanity does include a discussion of "Chinese cosmogony." Even so, his presentation of Confucian metaphysics relies heavily on the contemporary Confucian scholar Tu Wei-ming, whose metaphysical thought mainly draws on one neo-Confucian thinker, Zhang Zai (1020–1077 C.E). However, there is a long tradition of metaphysics in Confucianism starting from its earliest commentary on the *Classic of Change* and persisting through the debates on varying visions of cosmology and ontology among neo-Confucian and contemporary Confucian thinkers. Since whether the objective reference of "ultimate concern" registers in Asian religions is a central concern in the chapters on Buddhism, this volume appears to be lacking a critical engagement with metaphysics in the Confucian tradition.

Third, despite contributing invaluable scholarship, some of the volume's chapters could have been even more inspiring had the authors better coordinated them. For example, in order to accommodate Tillich's thought of existentialism within the Buddhist term of "no-self," Ellen Y. Zhang creatively states that "Tillich's idea could be understood as human existence being devoid of its self-nature, that is, 'essence' since it is 'dependently rising' through the 'essence of divinity'" (p. 104). This statement apparently runs counter to Tillich's own view that compared to Buddhism, the Christian mystical experience never yields to a "non-self" stance, and this view has been carefully introduced in the first chapter (pp. 11–12). Another example of the lack of mutual scrutiny among authors is Andrew Tsz Wan HUNG's comparative understanding of love. HUNG says that "The nature of Confucian *ren* is partial; it stresses loving one's family first and then extends such love towards all humans. However, Christian agape is a kind of universal and impartial love towards all humans" (p. 188). This is directly opposite to what Anthony WANG Tao argued in the aforementioned chapter. Given WANG's integrating efforts on Christian and Confucian ideas of love, I believe HUNG should also rethink a part of his conclusion that due to the lack of the Christian idea of grace, Confucian ideas would undermine their contribution to democracy, which is historically rooted in a more radical awareness of human nature as flawed (p. 195).

Notwithstanding these deficiencies, the volume offers an outstanding multifaceted and profound interreligious study of three major traditions: Christianity as interpreted by Paul Tillich, Buddhism, and Confucianism. I believe scholars will benefit greatly from this study as they pursue research that includes, but is not limited to, the issues set forth above.

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