

The Philosophical Research Society, Inc.

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Dear Friends:



ONE of the most interesting and perceptive of the writers of Oriental arts was Professor Masaharu Anesaki, who was an instructor in the Imperial University of Tokyo and sometime professor at Harvard University. In 1915 he published a book entitled *Buddhist Art in Its Relation to Buddhist Ideas* with the cooperation of the Boston Museum of Art. It is especially interesting that Professor Anesaki dedicated this volume to St. Francis of Assisi, whom he obviously held in the highest esteem. In the preface to his book, Professor Anesaki stated that he had made two trips to Italy and became deeply involved in the productions of the quattrocento, the artistic and literary masters of the fifteenth century.

Through the study of the Italian painters with their extremely sensitive presentations of sacred subjects and their extraordinary skill in composition and color, Professor Anesaki was strongly reminded of the religious paintings and sculpturings of his own country. He found so many parallels, especially in the motivation, between Buddhist and Christian art that he began to consider art and religion as the two most powerful instruments in the unfoldment and enrichment of the psychic life of man. He realized that the beauties of scriptural texts were revelations of art in words providing the inspiration for graphic representation. Thus, religion ennobled art and art glorified religion. This partnership was satisfying to the internal life of man, helping him to maintain a simple devotional attitude to God and his fellowmen.

Having reoriented himself in Buddhist art, especially the productions of the Esoteric sects and the Zen school, Professor Anesaki approached Eastern mystical symbolism much in the spirit of the devout St. Francis. He was searching for a quiet and natural elevation of consciousness and soon realized that the content of Buddhist art was in no way essentially different from that which attracted him to medieval and early modern Christian paintings. He was no longer primarily interested in the literal subject matter, but he responded to a radiant atmosphere of sublimity which seemed to envelope the pictures. This could only result from the artist considering his paintings to be votive works--a personal form of worship.

Professor Anesaki began to see and experience the inner peace that comes from the acceptance of beauty as a religious duty and necessity. As a result, his book is unique among works devoted to the general theme. He has sought constantly for content,

concerned more with the cultivation of an inner stillness within himself by which he accepted the meaning without intellectual interferences.

The Buddhist universe was very different in meaning from the early Christian concept of the world. The two beliefs could not be reconciled astronomically, but it has become increasingly obvious that they were not intended to be accepted scientifically. The problem was to find forms by which the moral forces of existence could be pictured. The alchemy of human emotions suggested certain designs, patterns, and even geometrical diagrams. When the inner life of man determines to express itself outwardly, art comes into existence. Eastern and Western viewpoints have distinctly different emphasis, but both arise from observations and reflections based upon human experience. In the Orient, experience is the most important reason for man's existence. The successful life is the one which has enriched itself through thoughtful meditation upon things seen and done. The world is a school, and those who graduate from the mortal sphere enter into higher realms of education. All education is under discipline which in turn is sustained by an inspiring pattern of convictions. Art makes the invisible real and also moves the thoughtful person to a kind of reminiscence in which he remembers his relationship with the divine and natural universe.

Professor Anesaki considered art not as a substitute for discipline but a subtle force which makes self-discipline simple and obviously valuable. Most Oriental paintings dealing with Buddhism are to a measure meditation pictures, suggesting the true humanity of man and revealing to each person his own archetypal self. As he gazes upon this sublime imagery arranged in his temple, the Buddhist is no longer in the presence of the remote and the unobtainable. He is close to communion with ideal imagery and finds that spiritual peace is available to him here and now. Such was the faith of St. Francis, who accomplished a magnificent reintegration of his own character by holding firmly to his realization of the immediate presence of God. Professor Anesaki knew that to Buddhists the divine power is in the heart of all things. It is not separate, above, or outside, but forever and eternally within. True enlightenment must therefore be the revelation of the universal reality through symbols arising in the deepest parts of human nature. Sacred art has a refining influence which bestows a blessing upon the heart and mind. In gentle acceptance of this blessing, the mental and emotional pressures subside and in the peace of beauty the inner mystery is released, not as a doctrine but as a splendid union with the inevitable. In his preface to *Buddhist Art in Its Relation to Buddhist Ideas*, Professor Anesaki explained his reason for dedicating his book to St. Francis, sincerely hoping that his Catholic friend would not misunderstand his motives. Those who read his inspiring work will recognize that it is a bridge of living idealism uniting East and West.



Some years ago we secured from Hong Kong a small ornamental carving representing *Horizon*, the blessed land of the Taoist saints. It is nearly always a charming representation of a mountainous region with great cliffs rising into a clear blue sky. Below, the scene opens into a pleasant glen with trees, a little stream, sometimes a bridge, and usually a temple and the hermitage of a holy man.

A few days ago I was fortunate in securing an unusually fine example of the *Horizon* ornament. I have shown it to several friends who are acquainted with this type of art, and they all consider it exceptional, so we reproduce it herewith. The carving is of soapstone, about five and one-half inches high and seven inches wide, and is probably from fifty to one hundred years old. In these times when most folks are seeking a private Shangri-la, peaceful scenes are especially inspiring. Several of my friends have retired from city life but so far as I can learn they have not managed



*Detail from a Soapstone Carving
of the Region of the Blessed*

to find a paradise even remotely resembling the little soapstone carving. Perhaps this is the reason why the Chinese especially enjoy a miniature ornament of this kind. Such a carving enables you to sit back in your comfortable chair and bring the realms of the immortals into your own home. I remember that when I was in Mukden so many years ago, I visited in the home of a cultured Chinese family. As is usually the case, the house was squeezed in between other buildings, and there was nothing to recommend the view from any part of the house. The ingenious proprietor of the establishment had made four false windows, and in each of these he had set up an exquisite landscape. Each of the scenes was about four feet wide, two feet deep, and three feet high. The miniature objects had been so perfectly carved that there was nothing to disturb the feeling that you were looking out over a great

distance. These charming scenic effects could not be damaged by industrial installations or neighbors who neglected their property. We may all come sometime to the need to create an atmosphere that gives meaning and charm to immediate surroundings.

Speaking of scenery, many of our friends will soon be on vacation. When we realize that a rest also includes some type of self-improvement, why not spend this holiday in some area where unusual and interesting things are happening. There are many parts of this country rich in historical and artistic value which can give us new insight into the interests and activities which make up our way of life. We wish for each and all of you a pleasant interlude from the pressures of daily living.

Always most sincerely,

Marilyn B. Hall

SPECIAL NOTICE FROM OUR BOOK DEPARTMENT

A number of important and scholarly volumes in our fields of interest are now available in attractive and accurate reprints. Most of those listed here are included in Mr. Hall's list of recommended reading and have long been rare and out of print. To these have been added selected works by outstanding modern authors. The Contributors' Bulletin will list additional works in future issues. These books may be ordered directly from The Philosophical Research Society, Inc. (address on page one). Please add 25¢ for handling on orders of less than \$5.00, and sales tax is to be included by California residents. Note: Prices are subject to change without notice.

<u>Title</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Price</u>
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Mysticism East and West	Rudolf Otto (P)	2.45
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