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Buddhist Cosmology: Philosophy and Origins. By Akira Sadakata. Tokyo: Koosei Publishing Co., 1997. 224 pages. ISBN 4-333-01682-3, \$12.95.

Reviewed by

Rupert Gethin

*Lecturer in Indian Religions
University of Bristol, United Kingdom
Email: rupert.gethin@bristol.ac.uk*

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This book is essentially a translation of a work first published in Japan under the title *Shunisen to Gokuraku* (Tokyo, 1973), although it appears to incorporate some additional material published in journals since (p. 224). It is divided into two main parts—“Pre-Mahāyāna Cosmology” (chapters one to four) and “Mahāyāna Cosmology” (chapters five to nine)—each part being roughly equal in length (ninety-two and ninety-eight pages respectively).

The first part is basically an exposition of the details of Buddhist cosmology as found in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* supplemented by material from the Chinese translation of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*. In other words, what is presented is the developed *Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika* understanding of Buddhist cosmology. The first chapter deals with the physical universe: Buddhist atomism and the physical geography of the earth (Mount Sumeru, the oceans, continents, etc.). The second chapter gives an account of the different kinds of existence into which beings may be reborn (hellish, animal, human, heavenly, etc.). The third chapter considers rebirth, what determines it (karma) and the possibility of escape. The fourth chapter provides an account of the Buddhist understanding of time beginning with the smallest moment, moving on to the calendar of months, seasons and years, and finishing with a discussion of the universe's vast cycles of expansion and contraction across great eons of time.

In discussing these matters, there is no systematic attempt to consider the earlier phase of Buddhist cosmology as found in the Pali *Nikāyas* or Chinese *Āgamas*, nor is any account provided of the other developed system of Buddhist cosmology of which we have reasonably full knowledge, namely that of the Theravādins. Of course, there is considerable overlap between the *Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika* and Theravādin cosmological systems, although Sadakata does not even tell us that; in fact, he chooses to completely ignore the Theravādin scheme. This means that he cannot deal fully with the questions of the origin and development of Buddhist cosmology. Nevertheless, Sadakata does provide us with more than simply a detailed description of the *Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika* cosmology; he does on occasion point out some precedents and parallels in earlier Buddhist literature and also non-Buddhist literature. Thus, his discussion of hells (pp. 41-54) draws attention to the early appearance of the names of certain hells in the *Suttanipāta* as well as lists and descriptions of hells in the *Manusmṛti* and *Jaina* texts such as the *Uttarajjhayana* and *Sūyagaḍa* suttas. He also briefly but helpfully discusses Greek ideas of atomism and transmigration and their relationship to Indian ideas.

Sadakata's treatment of the relationship in *Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika* thought between the higher realms of the cosmos and the higher stages of the

Buddhist path in chapter three must be judged incomplete. He omits any account of the 'Pure Abodes' (*suddhāvāsa*) as the form realms occupied by non-returners (*anāgāmin*), an idea paralleled in some Mahāyāna writings where the highest of the 'Pure Abodes', *Akaniṣṭha*, is seen as the realm where bodhisattvas finally become buddhas. Instead, he focuses on the realm of formlessness (*ārūpya-dhātu*) as the basis for awakening, and rather confusingly introduces a discussion of 'non-duality' in the *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*.

In the second part of the book, a particular Japanese orientation comes to the fore, both in the topics that are highlighted, and in the manner in which Sadakata makes connections with more recent, specifically Japanese, developments. Thus, chapter five is concerned with *Sukhāvāṭī*, the Pure Land of *Amitābha*, and the possible influence (via central Asia) of Egyptian and Greek ideas on the development of this concept in China. Chapter six moves on to consider various Buddhas and bodhisattvas more generally, and includes a short treatment of *trikāya* theory, as well as a mention of other Buddhist deities (e.g., *nāgas*, *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, etc.) in their role as protectors of Buddhism. Chapter seven deals in the main with the 'lotus repository world' and the cosmic Buddha, *Vairocana*, of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. Chapter eight considers some aspects of the development of the specifically Japanese understanding of hell and judgment in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; in this connection Sadakata raises the possibility of Greek and Iranian influence in China.

The final chapter of the book (chapter nine), although placed within part two, provides some general reflections on the questions that arise when traditional Buddhist cosmology meets modern scientific cosmologies. Sadakata outlines a modernist approach based on demythologizing; thus, it doesn't matter if the contemporary Buddhist finds the Buddhist notion of rebirth outmoded:

The body of a dead worm returns to the earth, and its constituents change and become grass. This grass is eaten and becomes part of a cow, and eventually people eat the cow. Then they, too, return to the earth and become worms . . . Transmigration is the intuitive expression of this meaningless round of birth and death (p. 177).

Indeed, Sadakata suggests, Buddhist cosmology can be seen as expressing in symbolic terms the truths of modern science:

If we remove the graphic, the dogmatic, and the mythological from the expressions of Buddhist cosmologists, we are left with a series of concepts that resemble in no small way the conclusions of modern science. We may include here ideas such as the solar and

galactic systems, the birth and extinction of nebulae, the birth of the heavenly bodies from cosmic dust, and the concept of thousands and billions of light years (p. 181).

The problem here is how much ground can Buddhist cosmology concede to modern science before it ceases to be Buddhist? But this raises further complex questions that need more space and time than the present review can accommodate. For a rather different approach that gives more consideration of the psychological equivalences of Buddhist cosmology, see the present reviewer's "Cosmology and Meditation: From the *Aggañña Sutta* to the Mahāyāna;" *History of Religions* 36 (1997): 183-219.

Overall, it is the first part of this book that is the more complete and self-contained. Indeed it constitutes the best and most comprehensive description of *Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika* cosmology available in English that I have come across. The second part touches on a vast range of material and is rather more sketchy. Inevitably Sadakata's work prompts comparison with the other readily available monograph on Buddhist cosmology, namely R. Kloetzli's, *Buddhist Cosmology: From Single World System to Pure Land* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983). Despite any shortcomings, to my mind it is Sadakata's book that provides the more systematic, complete and accessible treatment of Buddhist cosmology. Particularly helpful, especially in the first part, are the frequent charts and diagrams illustrating various aspects of the cosmology. There is something of a dearth of published material on Buddhist cosmology and Sadakata's is certainly a most useful and handy addition that sets out very clearly a wealth of information that has not been easily accessible. The translation of this volume into English is to be welcomed.