

University of Kochi International Japan Studies Lecture Series No.58

Title “All the Way from Germany to Japan – Zen Seen Through Blue Eyes”
Speaker Nölke Muhō (Antaiji, Hyogo / Osaka)
Time December 13, 2019, 18:30-20:30h
Venue University of Kochi, Eikokuji campus (A101)

“It is you who has to build the Antaiji temple!” This is what Nölke Muhō was told by the then abbot of the Antaiji temple when he first started his apprenticeship as a Zen monk at the same temple in the northwestern part of Hyōgo prefecture. It came moments after he proclaimed that he had “come to study Buddhism” followed by a scathing retort from the abbot of “You fool... this is not a school!” They must have sounded as harsh words thrown at a young man in his early twenties who had just come from Germany, and mysterious at that. Still, one could argue they are very much in line with an essential tenet of Zen, which rejects a standard, mundane logic in its answers to the meaning of our everyday lives and work, as well as of a monk’s ascetic training.



Roughly, the lecture we heard can be separated into a first part, introducing the life path of the speaker, and a second part that dwelled on the teachings of Zen itself.

Nölke Muhō was born and raised in West-Berlin. He lost his mother and started to have serious doubts about the meaning of life at a young age. In Germany, the so-called “Konfirmation” ceremony associated with traditional upbringings forces youngsters to think seriously about what role religion will play in their lives, but for the young Nölke it was not to be the Christian faith, but instead the spiritual aspects of “zazen” – he had been invited to a few practice sessions by his teacher – that attracted him most. In search of more answers, he went to Japan and after some twists and turns ended up in the Antaiji temple. His apprenticeship lasted for about ten years. Once recognized as a monk, he faced the difficult choice of staying in Japan or going back to Germany. Somewhat ironically, there are many “zazen” circles in Germany, even in smaller regional cities, but no temples, whereas in Japan, there are many Zen temples (about 15000) but occasions to participate in “zazen” sessions are far more limited. He decided to stay in Japan, spending a few years among the homeless who have put up tents in the Castle Park in Osaka. Eighteen years ago, the sudden death of the abbot of Antaiji (due to an accident when clearing snow) brought him back to that temple, where he assumed the abbotship as each of the four other monks who actually were senior in rank refused the offer (or weren’t available to do so). Leading a temple that basically has to provide for its own needs for food and heat turned out to be a difficult task, but Nölke Muhō was able to “set a record” as the longest serving abbot in the history of the temple. Japanese as well as foreign men and women have come to learn at the temple, and it is with peace of mind that he will turn over leadership of the temple to one of his apprentices next year. He will stay in Osaka and continue his activities, giving lectures and organizing “zazen” sessions in Japan and abroad.

As mentioned, he did not just talk about his personal experiences, but also about the teachings of Zen. Two of the things he mentioned were particularly remarkable, the first being the concept of *tenzo*, or the

practice of preparing food for the other monks, which is considered by no means a menial duty (Nölke Muhō recalled how his apprenticeship started with learning how to prepare food for the monks, three times a day – not an easy feat for a young man coming from a culture that does not count culinary prowess among life’s important skills, to put it mildly). The second was his reference to the three mental states (literally “joyful hearth,” “an elderly heart” and “great heart”), stressing the importance of tolerance in the face of hardship, generosity, and of the challenges posed by those near to us. Hearing this was a moment that students and the citizens of Kochi felt there was a lesson to be learnt and nodded in assent – that moment felt as the moment when a small Antaiji was set up inside all of us gathered here at the Eikokuji campus.

報告 高知県立大学日本学プログラム講演シリーズ 58

タイトル 「はるばるニッポンへ—青い目がみた禅」

講師 ネルケ無方 (大阪市在住)

場所 永国寺キャンパス 教育研究棟 A101

日時 令和元年 12 月 13 日(金) 18:30~20:30

言語 日本語 参加者 83 名

「安泰寺は、お前が作るんだ！」— 兵庫県北西部にある安泰寺という禅寺で修行僧となったばかりのネルケ無方が当時の住職に投げかけられた言葉である。それは、「ここで仏教を学びたい」と言って「バカ、ここは学校じゃない」と言い返された後の事だった。住職の叱咤は、ドイツから渡ってきた、20 歳そこそこの青年には厳しくて謎めいたものと聞こえたが、それは、人生や仕事や修行の意味について頭で理解し答えを出そうとすることを拒む禅の真髄に迫る、むしろ象徴的な言葉であったといえる。あるいは、ネルケ無方が永国寺キャンパスで講演が行われる間、安泰寺は高知にある、とも言えるかもしれない。

講演は、講師個人の歩みに関する紹介と、禅の教えに立ち入る部分とに分けることが出来る。言うまでもないが、その両方に来客を聞き入りさせる輝きがあった。

ネルケ無方は、西ベルリンで生まれ育つ。若い時に母親を亡くし、その後「生きる意味はあるのか」という疑問を強く抱くようになる。ドイツでは、Konfirmation を機に青年たちが自らの宗教的信念について真剣な決断を迫られる仕組みが存在する。ネルケ少年はキリスト教よりも、学校の先生のすすめで出会った座禅に魅力を感じる。その奥深さに惹かれて日本に渡り、曲折を経て安泰寺にたどり着く。10 年近く修行を積んでから、一人前の僧侶となるが、ドイツに帰るか日本で活動を続けるか、また悩む。というのも、ドイツの場合、座禅会は多く、あまり規模の大きくない地方都市でも見つけることが出来るらしい。一方の日本の場合、禅寺こそ多い(1 万 5 千山ほど)が、座禅会は少ない。大阪城公園のホームレスたちと座禅会を開いたりもするが、18 年ほど前に転機が訪れる。安泰寺の住職が雪かきの事故で命を落とすと、後継ぎ探しが始まる。ネルケ無方は、「継承順位」では 5 番目だったそうだが、ほかの僧が次々と辞退すると、大きな不安を抱えつつも役職を引き受け安泰寺へもどり頭堂となる。豪雪地帯での自給自足の生活は楽ではないが、国内外の弟子を育てつつ、歴代住職の中で 18 年という最長在任期間の記録を持つまでに至る。来年度は弟子にバトン(袈裟?)を引き渡し、大阪を拠点にさらなる活動(講演や国内外での座禅会など)を展開する予定である。

しかし、彼自身の生涯だけでなく、教えそのものにも話が及んだ。とくに、印象に残るのは、「典座(てんぞ)」、つまり料理番という役職の重要性に関するお話(食文化が大いに違うドイツから来た若者にとって一日三食の準備は苦勞の連続であった)と、「喜心・老心・大心」、つまり寛大で大きな心で自らの苦痛と不幸、また他

人の言動を見つめ受け入れることのお話であった。学生たちと高知市民の皆さんがこのお話を聞いて頷いたときこそ、永国寺にいる我々の中に小さな安泰寺が生まれたのではないかと感じた瞬間である。

このレクチャーシリーズでは、日本と外国との境界線を越えて、日本文化の様々な顔を探ります。

今後の予定が決まり次第お知らせ申し上げます。We look forward to seeing you at our next event!

