



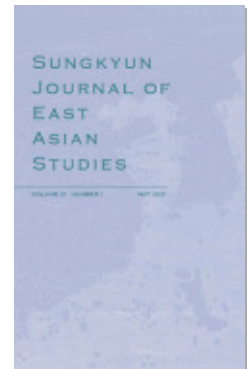
PROJECT MUSE®

*Buddhist Apologetics in East Asia: Countering the  
Neo-Confucian Critiques in the Hufa lun and the Yusök  
chirŭi non* by Uri Kaplan (review)

Thomas Jülch

Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies, Volume 21, Number 1, May  
2021, pp. 123-125 (Review)

Published by Duke University Press



➔ For additional information about this article  
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/797232>

Uri Kaplan, *Buddhist Apologetics in East Asia: Countering the Neo-Confucian Critiques in the Hufa lun and the Yusök chirüi non*.

Leiden: Brill, 2019. 282 pages. ISBN-13: 978-9004405332 (hardcover). US\$ 98.96.

Uri Kaplan's book offers an introduction to Buddhist apologetic writing in East Asia, followed by translations of two Buddhist apologetic scriptures that relate to the context of defending Buddhism against Neo-Confucianism. The scriptures are the *Hufa lun* 護法論 (*In Defense of the Dharma*) written in Song dynasty China by the lay Buddhist Zhang Shangying 張商英 (1043–1121) and the *Yusök chirüi non* 儒釋質疑論 (*Probing the Doubts and Concerns between Confucianism and Buddhism*) written in fifteenth-century Korea by an anonymous monk or monks. Subsequent to the translations, Kaplan offers text editions of both works (*Hufa lun* translation, pp. 57–108, text edition, pp. 109–21; *Yusök chirüi non* translation, pp. 122–228, text edition, pp. 229–55). The *Hufa lun* consists of eleven sections. The *Yusök chirüi non* consists of twenty-six sections. In his translations of both works, Kaplan begins each section by first summarizing its contents in his own words. The summaries are given in italics to differentiate them from the translated text.

The introduction that precedes the translations goes beyond detailing the contexts the two translated texts were written in and instead provides a more or less general overview of the history of Buddhist apologetic thought in China, Korea, and even Japan (1–55). Kaplan begins with the early period of Chinese Buddhist apologetic writing, which extended from early medieval China to the early Tang dynasty. During that time, both Buddhism and Daoism were in dominant positions within the religious and intellectual sphere, which made them natural rivals. Buddhist apologists also had to relate to Confucianism, but in many of the contemporary Buddhist apologetic scriptures the main focus was to defend Buddhism against Daoism (3–11). In the late Tang dynasty the Confucian scholar Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) began to criticize Buddhism for having introduced social norms to China that did not suit the traditional Confucian patterns. And in the Song dynasty, with the emergence of Neo-Confucianism, the Confucian tradition reestablished itself as the dominant intellectual current in China. While not all Neo-Confucian scholars followed Han Yu in polemicizing against Buddhism (11–21), many did. The new situation created a need for a different kind of Buddhist apologetic thought, in which defending Buddhism against Neo-Confucianism stood more in the foreground. Kaplan introduces seven works of relevance in this context. One of the works introduced here is the *Hufa lun* by Zhang Shangying (21–32). Subsequently, Kaplan provides a brief outlook on Chinese Buddhist apologetic writing during the Yuan dynasty (32–33). Next, Kaplan introduces two Korean Buddhist apologetic works, the second of which is the *Yusök chirüi non*

(33–37). Finally, Kaplan provides outlooks on Buddhist apologetics in Ming China (37–39), on Buddhist apologetics in sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Korea (39–41), and on Buddhist apologetics in Tokugawa Japan (41–42). Kaplan concludes his introduction by summing up argumentation strategies that are employed in Buddhist apologetic treatises—especially in the Neo-Confucian context he is concerned with in his translations (42–55).

It is unfortunate that Kaplan never defines the purpose of his introduction. Clearly he goes beyond offering information relevant to the understanding and contextualization of the translated texts. In fact, as the above summary of the introduction has shown, the texts Kaplan translates are only introduced in sub-chapters of the introduction. Rather, Kaplan appears to offer a wide panorama of the history of Buddhist apologetic thought in East Asia. Accomplishing this task in a balanced way would, however, have required much more space. So Kaplan offers information on a selection of topics. His choice of topics does, however, occasionally seem arbitrary. Below I will give two examples of matters not in the introduction that should, in my view, have been included based on how the introduction is conceptualized.

As Kaplan does go into some detail with regard to the early period of Chinese Buddhist apologetic writing in which the Buddho-Daoist confrontation stood more in the foreground, it would have been suitable to point out the importance of Falin 法琳 (572–640) more explicitly. Falin is known for his apologetic treatises *Poxie lun* 破邪論 (T 2109, *Essay Refuting Heresy*) and *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論 (T 2110, *Essays of Disputation and Correction*), which form by far the most complex Buddhist apologetic work written in the context of the Buddho-Daoist confrontation. In Falin much of the earlier Chinese Buddhist apologetic tradition is summed up, so that Falin's work could be called a culmination of early Chinese Buddhist apologetic literature. Kaplan does occasionally refer to Falin, however without pointing out Falin's particular importance. Normally I do not reference my own work in book reviews, but in this case it seems that familiarity with two publications of mine could have provided a better sense of the importance of Falin to Chinese Buddhist apologetic thought.<sup>1</sup> It is surprising that a monograph seeking to give an overview of East Asian Buddhist apologetic thought leaves these publications completely unmentioned.

Also with regard to Kaplan's outlook on Chinese Buddhist apologetic writing during the Yuan dynasty, it is surprising to see that he does not point out that during the Yuan dynasty the Buddho-Daoist confrontation resurfaced. In 1258 a major debate was held between seventeen Buddhist monks and seventeen Daoist priests, while Xiangmai 祥邁, one of the participating Buddhist monks, recorded the proceedings. The resulting work is titled *Bianwei lu* 辯偽錄 (T 2116, *Accounts of Disputation of Falsehood*). It is a massive source of Chinese Buddhist apologetic thought. Both the *Bianwei lu* and the general Buddho-Daoist confrontation during the Yuan dynasty have been discussed in a classic study by Joseph Thiel.<sup>2</sup> Kaplan mentions neither the *Bianwei lu* nor Thiel's article. As Kaplan rather elaborately covers the Buddhist-Daoist controversy in the early period of Buddhist apologetic

writing, it would have been suitable also to point out how the Buddho-Daoist confrontation continued in the Yuan dynasty.

When it comes to editorial details, Kaplan is imprecise in the usage of Chinese transcription systems. Chinese terms are transcribed in pinyin in the first place. Mistakes in the usage of pinyin are, however, seen repeatedly. *Poxie lun* is generally miswritten *Paxie lun* (132, 164, 259). The name of the poet Sun Chuo 孫綽 is generally miswritten Sun Cho (7, 9). Wade-Giles would have been Sun Ch'ò. But even in quoting Arthur Link's article "Sun Ch'ò's Yü-tao-lun: A Clarification of the Way," Kaplan does not take over Link's Wade-Giles spelling and keeps writing "Sun Cho" in his quotation of the article title (4, 7, 9, 266). Occasionally Kaplan also confuses Chinese characters. For instance, Zongmi's treatise *Yuanren lun* 原人論 is introduced as 原因論 (44); and Qisong's *Bujiao bian* 輔教編 is introduced as 補教編 (24). The spelling of Sanskrit terms is inconsistent. Sometimes diacritics are used and sometimes they are not. So, on the one hand, we find *Shakyamuni*, *Asoka*, *nirvana*, *samsara*, *mudra*, *mandala*, and so forth, and on the other hand we find *Śuddhodana*, *Mahākāśyapa*, *Mañjuśrī*, *Tuṣita*, *śrāvakas*, and so on.

As one assesses the value of the book to the exploration of East Asian Buddhist apologetic literature, all the above should be rated as minor issues. Even though the introduction may neglect certain matters, it still offers a useful display of information. And Kaplan provides translations of two important texts that have not been translated before. Translations are important in preparing the ground for the translated texts to find better representation in more general studies of religious and intellectual history. Hence Kaplan's book is a welcome contribution that helps to further enrich our understanding of the Buddhist apologetic tradition.

Thomas Jülch  
Independent scholar

## NOTES

1. Thomas Jülch, *Bodhisattva der Apologetik: Die Mission des buddhistischen Tang-Mönchs Falin*, 3 vols. (Munich: Utz, 2014); Thomas Jülch, "In Defense of the Saṃgha: The Buddhist Apologetic Mission of the Early Tang Monk Falin," in *The Middle Kingdom and the Dharma Wheel*, edited by Thomas Jülch (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 18–93.

2. Joseph Thiel, "Der Streit der Buddhisten und Taoisten zur Mongolenzeit," *Monumenta Serica* 20 (1961): 1–81.