

TO: DAVID C. + MICHAEL K.  
FROM: DAVID S.

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY / JULY 4, 1994

## NONFICTION ORIGINALS

### THANK YOU AND OK!

#### An American Zen Failure in Japan

David Chadwick. Penguin/Arkana.  
\$11.95, ISBN 0-14-019467-6

Hats off to newcomer Chadwick for his engaging account of a nearly four-year stay in a rural Buddhist temple and subsequent adventures in Japan. A stickler for detail, he jots down minutiae as he tries to make sense out of the mix of tradition and change—such as the ancient temple altar where 500-year-old scrolls sit next to a large matchbox bearing a picture of a grinning, winking Japanese man and the English advertising slogan "THANK YOU AND OK!" Chadwick, who studied Zen for more than 20 years to little avail before heading to Japan, tends to lean over backward to stare at his belly button, but his writer's skill is evident in everything from skin crawling descriptions of *mukade* (dreaded scorpion-like insects) to a benevolent look at *takuhatsu*, formal monks' begging. Several chapters are rib-tickling Abbott and Costello-type routines with Chadwick as straight man. None is finer than Chadwick's day at the Driver's License Test Building—a remarkable commentary on human endurance, the unflinching courtesy of bureaucrats in the face of "what cannot be helped," and sheer lunacy as when the bureaucrat asks about the written test he had taken in California: "And what language was the test administered in, Japanese or English?" The book is long and the confusing interweaving of Chadwick's stay at the temple Hongoji with accounts of life in the Japanese 'burbs is unnecessary. But whenever the reader begins to think about putting the book down, the writing picks up and one is hooked again. (Aug.)