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Review

Reviewed Work(s):

Studies in Indian and Indo-Indonesian Tantrism: The Kuñjara-karṇa-dharmakathana and the Yogatantra

by Max Nihom

Review by: G. E. Marrison

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MAX NIHOM: *Studies in Indian and Indo-Indonesian tantrism: the Kuñjarakarna-dharmakathana and the Yogatantra*. (Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, vol. 21.) 222 pp. Vienna: Institut für Indologie der Universität Wien, 1994.

This work consists of three studies of aspects of Buddhist Tantrism as reflected in the fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Old Javanese poetic version of the story of Kuñjarakarna. The origin, character and development of Buddhism in pre-Muslim Java is of great interest, but many of the major questions about it remain unanswered. Nihom has made a contribution with the thesis that parts of this poem are based on Buddhist Sanskrit tantric texts, including some well-known mandalas; and he takes issue with Teeuw and Robson who, in translating and commenting on the text in 1981, had stressed the indigenous character of the poem as developing a Javanese syncretic world-view. (See review in *BSOAS*, 46/3, 1983, 586–8.)

Nihom's first study is of Buddhist tantric ritual as represented in the Kuñjarakarna poem. He analyses the role of the tantric practitioner, the doctrine of the six enemies, or moral failings, and the four gifts of material goods, fearlessness, the Buddhist teaching and friendliness, suggesting the Indian antecedents of these features. The second piece is concerned with the apparent absence of influence from one of the most important Tantras, the *Tattvasamgraha*, but the presence in the poem of traces of four Indian Buddhist mandalas. The third study deals with heaven, hell and salvation in the Javanese poem, and their probable Indian sources. In all these, where necessary, Nihom also cites Tibetan evidence, noting however that this is secondary, and often much later than the original Sanskrit texts.

The author sets out his approach: 'Whatever the intrinsic value of knowing what practising Buddhists did and thought on a more or less mundane level, this lacks the overarching interest and universal importance of the nature of being, becoming and destiny, which are the province of elitist religion' (p. 9); and again: 'The canon or high culture then requires what is thought, with the notion in the background that what is thought, after all, determines experience' (p. 10). This is a subjective stance, and when the author seeks to controvert the views of Teeuw and Robson, he seems to me to be advancing one set of speculations in place of another in the intangible field of mythology.

Nihom has brought great commitment and learning into his essays: but in the exposition of so difficult a subject, has not always provided simple explanations. He gives an extensive bibliography, and indexes of proper names, authors and texts; it would have been desirable also to have had a glossarial index of the Buddhist terms cited, and a concordance of textual references.

Comparison with other versions of the

Kuñjarakarna would probably add weight to Nihom's thesis. The *yaksa* Kuñjarakarna was saved from hell and brought back to life through the compassion of the Buddha Vairocana and his teaching on the Good Law (*sudharma*); his royal friend, Pūrnavijaya was also saved, and cured of his leprosy, by Vairocana. This story is typical of Old Javanese Buddhist literature, in which didactic tales of Avadāna type are the principal texts to preserve Buddhist teaching in Java. The apparently earlier prose version is a lively rendering in comparatively simple language; next in time comes the series of relief panels on the sides of the temple, Candi Jago, near Malang; and last is the poetic version, the subject of the present volume. The sculptures follow the prose text fairly closely: but the poem, which also includes most of the substance of the prose version, has much additional material and a considerably different presentation, especially in the introduction of sections of Buddhist teaching, which are absent from, or only hinted at in the prose. This is particularly the case with cantos 18–20, where Kuñjarakarna is in conversation with Vairocana, and again with cantos 36–39, where Pūrnavijaya is similarly engaged. Moreover, cantos 22–23 deal with the equivalence of Buddhism with Hinduism, a theme treated only summarily in the prose. This last needs more comment from Nihom if he is to maintain his view of the origins of syncretistic Buddhism in Java as against the conclusions of Teeuw and Robson.

Nihom's most important contributions to the study of Buddhism in Java are, firstly, to have widened and deepened the discussion, looking for possible Indian sources for the ideas expressed in the Javanese texts; and, secondly, in seeking to identify and cite Sanskrit texts and Tibetan translations, where parallels are sufficiently close to suggest actual dependence.

G. E. MARRISON

ROBERT CRIBB (ed.): *The late colonial state in Indonesia: political and economic foundations of the Netherlands Indies 1880–1942*. (Verhandelingen van het Koninklijke Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkerkunde, 163.) xiii, 295 pp. Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994. Guilders 40, \$29.50.

Robert Cribb emphasizes the need to look at continuities between the late colonial state and its Indonesian successor, but this laudable aim is only partly realized in this edited collection. Cribb's comparisons with British India underline the Dutch failure to recognize the logic of the growing autonomy of their huge colony, and the fatal Dutch mistake of trying to backpedal under the impact of the 1930s depression. Cornelis Fasseur illustrates a crucial aspect of this process in a ground-breaking study of the Kafkaesque confusion in population classification. Hokkien Chinese from Taiwan were