

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials*. by David and Janice Jackson. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, second revised ed., 1988. U.S. \$29.95

We have before us a remarkably good trade paperback book organized as an artist's manual. We are reminded of artists' manuals popular during the European Renaissance that were aimed at, not just artists (who already knew how to paint anyway), but at art connoisseurs. *Tibetan Thangka Painting* wraps erudition in a popular presentation to introduce the non-artist to the methods and materials used by Tibetans to create hanging scrolls known as thangka (ཐང་ཀླ). But this book may also be profitably studied by artists themselves; either as a review by people who already know how to paint in the Tibetan style, or as an *entrée* to this discipline by artists who work in other traditions.<sup>1</sup>

*Tibetan Thangka Painting* leads us through six specific steps of manufacture: the preparation of the cotton ground; the initial sketch or transfer of the overall design; laying down the first coats of paint; shading; outlining; and the finishing touches, including gold work. We also find a useful overview and explanation of iconometric theory.

Tibetan art (which drew its greatest lungful of inspiration from Indian art) measures its icons according to specific canons of proportions (མཐོང་ཆུང་). The figure of a deity is constructed the way a building is constructed: it is planned and measured. The resulting figure is even imagined something like a building and is called in Tibetan a support (རྩམ་) or bodily container (ཁྱེད་རྩམ་). It is within the confines of this construction that a spiritual force eventually resides.

The residence of the deity in a painted (or sculpted) image usually takes place after it's made by way of an investiture of breath performed by a lama at the moment of consecration (རྒྱུ་གནས་). But before such a ritual may be executed successfully the physical habitat for the deity must be suitably constructed. Iconometry, therefore, is considered an obligatory step by the Tibetan artist.

Previous artist's manuals,<sup>2</sup> in English and written by Tibetans, tend to present the iconometric traditions in which the respective authors have been trained. The Jacksons offer us a refreshingly wider and more objective view of canonical proportion. They present a variety of iconometric traditions, including some famous contradictions. Iconometry often occupies the small talk of Tibetan painters and much tongue flapping has ensued striving to resolve these contradictions. Efforts to determine the "correct" way to measure this or that deity has, at times, fostered unnecessary animosity between painters. The objective overview presented by the Jacksons permits an important insight into such supposed "correctness": we come away feeling that each tradition may be appreciated as valid unto itself.

An interesting note regarding iconometry concerns two informants listed by the Jacksons in their preface ("Dorje Drakpa and his monk brother..."). Once, during a course of study with these men, they suggested abandoning measurement altogether to draw everything free-hand. The proportions were still considered to be important, but they indicated that the vitality of a rendered deity could just as well be accomplished with a fluency of draftsmanship as by incrementally laying down lines measured a piece at a time. Both men learned to paint in the far east of Tibet and perhaps a possible exposure to Chinese painting influenced their attitude. No other Tibetan painter in this reviewer's experience ever suggested such a thing before or since; and the Jacksons do not mention it either.

A useful first chapter in *Tibetan Thangka Painting* sets the stage for readers by providing the historical backdrop and the cultural context in which Tibetan thangkas arise. We might make the argument (and many artists in the West do) that any form of art, produced anywhere on the globe and at any period in history, may be appreciated as it is without explanation. As far as sensual stimulation and the natural play of suggestion are concerned this may be a fair way to approach art. But it is also true that perception changes profoundly when we understand the specific conditions (social, economic, cultural, religious, etc.) that help elicit the graphic forms at hand. Obviously, the symbolic nature of Tibetan painting rather demands that we take a firm grasp on meaning.

The introductory essay impresses upon readers the far-reaching, indeed extraordinary, grip that Buddhism exerted on traditional Ti-

betan life and therefore on Tibet's arts and crafts. The appreciation of Tibetan art depends upon (perhaps to a greater degree than most other arts) understanding this backdrop — specifically upon understanding Buddhism. Thangkas were found everywhere in old Tibet; they hung on palatial walls and in yak hair tents. But unlike Western art, thangkas are neither conceived as nor intended to be decorations, however edifying. They are tools — technical appliances employed by the Buddhist adept as aids in visualization.

The authors tell us: "A Tibetan artist once explained to us why most of his patrons requested the painting of a thangka. The main reasons he mentioned were (1) sickness or troubles, (2) death in the family and (3) the need for an image in connection with a particular religious practice." Such reasons emphasize the immense gap that separates modern Western art from that of Tibet. Westerners tend to understand art as an aesthetic (from a Greek word referring to the senses), but the art of Tibet (and of India and medieval Europe) may be more accurately grasped as classical rhetoric; "the art of giving effectiveness to truth."<sup>3</sup>

The enormous "vocabulary" of forms in Tibetan art; the wide range of symbolic representations; the often rigid rules of iconometry; and the codification of color and gestures specified by various texts, tend to reinforce the image of Tibetan painting as an articulate "language." The rules governing the arrangement of these various graphic expressions are analogous to morphology, syntax and grammar. Tibetan Buddhist art could almost be thought of as an elaborate ideography; an ideography that stands nearly equidistant between aesthetic execution (a necessary ingredient in anything painted), and rhetorical meaning (considered by Tibetans to be highly significant).

This characterization begs the question: who speaks this language? Who imagines in it? And who are its scribes? The Jacksons also ask and answer similar questions. "Tibetan thangka painters by and large were ordinary artisans," they say, "the same people who painted wooden furniture and decorated the walls and architectural details of wealthy people's residences. The majority of them were pious laymen, and they usually came from families whose hereditary occupation was painting."

The authors point out that: "In the past many people thought that thangka painters were yogis who ritually evoked the deities and then depicted them in painted form. Although such a characterization has a slight basis in fact, it does not adequately describe most painters ... The misconception of the thangka painter as yogi no doubt mainly derives from textual sources. A number of sources ... set forth the ritual steps and visualizations that should accompany the painting of certain images. Yet in their everyday practice few artists followed such methods."

True, few do, but some artists are indeed yogis. One Sherpa artist depicted in the Jackson's book, Au Leshi, was (while he lived) the very

model of the artist/yogi. Unfortunately, the Jackson's do not expand on the life of this extraordinary man.<sup>4</sup> The Nyingmapa lama Trulshig Rinpoche once remarked that Au Leshi's thangkas required no consecration. It was assumed that Au Leshi's spiritual achievements permitted any deity that flowed from his brush to be considered fully inspired as it hit the canvass. This is a particularly remarkable assessment of a painter, since most painters operate as little more than copyists and generally perform duties somewhat akin to that of a sign painter.

This interesting bit of intelligence regarding Au Leshi's work prompted a colleague to joke that *his* deities were in such a catastrophic condition when he painted them that they were in desperate need of CPR or maybe oxygen. He deemed these emergency measures indispensable supplements to the lama's munificent application of ritual breath during consecration. But Au Leshi, who was also quite funny, consistently admonished patrons to obtain proper consecration of his work regardless of any reputation of authority that he may have accumulated from important lamas — a typical, self-deprecating gesture frequently displayed by artists of the better class.

There are many types of artists and they display varying degrees of integrity and ability. In fact, the manufacture of sacred art informs the intellectual life of any studied Tibetan. Most monks are quite familiar with the rules of proportion, the classes of deities, and — much to the surprise of outsiders — appear to be fully equipped to execute full blown paintings on their own but do not. Not everyone is an artist, to be sure, but many monks during the course of their education, will attempt to paint or draw something, at least once. Participation is important.

In the West, scholars and laypeople who study Tibetan painting and who may know a great deal about the subject rarely attempt to write in this language of forms. We find no examples of the Jackson's attempts at drawing or painting here either. And we may wonder why? Drawing and painting constitute the experimental basis of art and yield to the experimenter as much information about art as textual study or any other serious investigation. Imagine a chemist who, although widely read in chemistry, failed to perform experiments. Or, for that matter, a yogi who fails to establish empirical proofs. Yet few students of Tibetan art actually perform the experiments. Perhaps this reticence is due to an association with unfavorable status. Here in the West, as was also true in traditional Tibetan and Indian society, the social rank of artist is low.

The Tibetan "artist" (ལྷ་རྩེ་མཁན་) generally painted traditional images envisioned by others; and artists were accorded only slightly higher social status than that occupied by tailors or bootblacks. Painters were,

after all, craftsmen and not artists in the Western sense of individuals creating original work. Some of them, it's true, were gifted at what they did, and brought powerful aesthetic interpretations to classical motifs. But the true authors of those motifs were lamas, meditators or visionaries.

Some modern (Western) artists dismiss the Tibetan artistic tradition as being stifled by too many rules; or, more bluntly, that it simply is not art at all. For them, "art" begins with Giotto and Ciambue. The march through medieval agriculturalism; through Renaissance, and Reformation; through industrial and scientific revolutions seems to have left a substantial "language" barrier between modernism and tradition.

Humbled by the magnitude of this barrier, we might wonder why *Tibetan Thangka Painting* has been brought out yet again. Why would a Western audience (the book is also available in Europe) buy such a book? Mr. Jeff Cox, the publisher of Snow Lion Publications, informs us that the book originally came out in 1984, in cloth cover, by Shambala Publications. Then, by 1988 it was out of stock and unavailable. Mr. Cox says that in that year sales of books dealing with Tibetan subjects stagnated at disappointing levels. But then, in 1991, coinciding with the Year of Tibet, Tibetan culture received enormous publicity. Sales shot up, and Mr. Cox claims that this year (1994), for the first time, Snow Lion turned a profit. *Tibetan Thangka Painting* was brought out again, with a new four-color cover, to meet this dramatic rise in interest.

To get an idea of the true aperture of this public dialation of interest in Tibet, Mr. Cox tells us that Lalapalooza (a yearly music fete organized by the people at MTV and now in its third year) recently toured the United States with eight Namgyal monks who came from India to perform Tibetan music. These eight ululating Tibetan clerics shared the bill with the likes of The Beastie Boys and Smashin' Pumpkins. Stage props included Tibetan art. Lalapalooza made twenty stops in as many different cities across the country and played, on average, to crowds 25,000 strong. Surely, some of those in attendance were artists. *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials awaits them.*

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The appendix contains valuable information by a British painter, one of the illustrators of this book, Mr. Robert Beer, who explains in detail how to proceed with materials found in the average Western art supply store.

- <sup>2</sup> A partial list would include: *New Tibetan Art Book*, Jamyang Losal, Jayyed Press, Balliram Delhi, 1982; *Concise Tibetan Art Book*, Pema Namdol Thaye, Zangdok Palri New Monastery, Kalimpong, West Bengal, 1987; *Principles of Tibetan Art*, Gega Lama, vol. 1 & 2, Jamyang Singe Targain House, Darjeeling, West Bengal, 1983; *Tibetan Religious Art*, Loden Sherap Dagab, part 1 & 2, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1977.
- <sup>3</sup> cf. *A Figure of Speech or a Figure of Thought?*, by Ananda Coomaraswamy, in *Coomaraswamy*, vol 1, ed. Roger Lipsey, Bollingen Series LXXXIX, Princeton, 1977.
- <sup>4</sup> The Jacksons mention in their preface that Mr. Rohert Beer, the main illustrator of their book, was "formerly a student of ... Au Leshi" — a statement which makes the absence of more information seem odd. The confusion has been cleared up in a private communication from Mr. Beer who says that the description is merely a publication error. Mr. Beer saw a great deal of Au Leshi's work and it was in that sense that he studied from him.



*The Zen Eye: A Collection of Talks by Sokei-an* Edited and with an introduction by Mary Farkas. Tokyo and New York: Weatherhill, 1993. xxi + 167. With a foreword by Huston Smith. ISBN 0-8348-0272-4 \$12.95 paperback.

Sokei-an (Sasaki Shigetsu, 1882-1945) was among the very first of the first generation of Japanese teachers to arrive in America. His life and teaching deserve to be much better known, for he played a major role in the transmission of Zen to the West. However, beyond the several pages which Rick Fields devoted to him in his book, *How the Swans Came to the Lake* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986), readers interested in Sokei-an have had to seek out the now out of print *Cat's Yawn* (New York: First Zen Institute of America, 1947) or old back issues of *Zen Notes*, the First Zen Institute's newsletter. Now, to help fill out our understanding of this monk who formed the rock around which so much of early Zen in America flowed, Mary Farkas has produced *The Zen Eye*, an edited collection of Sokei-an's talks. The book also includes her introduction, a short biography of Sokei-an. Mary Farkas died in 1992. She was the former head of the First Zen Institute of America and, along with Ruth Fuller Sasaki, she must be counted among the very first of the serious first generation students. This book is partly a memorial to her as well.



Sokei-an first arrived in America as koji or layman Sasaki Shigetsu with that party of confident monks under Shaku Sokatsu Roshi who came in 1906 to plant the seeds of Zen in the West. Two years later, when Sokatsu packed up his group and returned to Japan, layman Sasaki lingered on in America. By 1916 he had made his way to New York City. Sasaki, sculptor and carver of dragons, felt much at home with the artists and writers of Greenwich Village. Although he returned to Japan for further training, thereafter he considered his home New York City, a city of which he often spoke with obvious affection.

Between 1919 and 1928, Sasaki went back and forth between Japan and America, and also back and forth in his resolve to complete Zen training. Ruth Fuller Sasaki, in an article published in *Wind Bell*, (San Francisco Zen Center, VIII, 1-2, [Fall 1969]) says that whenever he was in America, he worked as a wood carver; then finally on one of his trips, he threw his chisel into the sea and resolved to do what had to be done. After several more years of committed training, in 1928, Sokatsu acknowledged Sasaki's attainment and by August of the same year, Sasaki Sokei-an was back in New York, this time as a Zen teacher and this time to "bury his bones" in the West.

Sokei-an had adopted America as his country but when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, the United States arrested him as an enemy alien and sent him to relocation camp. Sokei-an's students managed finally to get his release in 1944 but his health had already been weakened by the rigors of camp life. Before his death, he married Ruth Fuller Everett and charged her with the task of finding a replacement roshi for the First Zen Institute and of completing his translation of the *Rinzai-roku* (*Record of Rinzaï*). As Ruth Fuller Sasaki, she crossed the ocean in the opposite direction and rebuilt Sokei-an's lineage temple, Ryosen-an on the grounds of Daitokuji, to house the research center for the First Zen Institute of America in Japan. Tall silver-haired Ruth-san became the first Westerner and the first woman to become a priest of a sub-temple of the Daitokuji. She died in 1967 in the sunroom of Ryosen-an.

Sokei-an's influence in the transmission of Zen to the West is important but, until recently, unmeasured. In 1930 he began the Hermitage of Sokei, "the First Zen Temple in the Western World," as *Cat's Yawn* describes it. The Hermitage formally became the Buddhist Society of America in 1931 and later evolved into the First Zen Institute of America. Alan Watts started *sanzen* there under Sokei-an. Sokei-an's extended influence reached across the ocean. At Ruth Fuller Sasaki's center at Daitokuji were Yanagida Seizan, now the recognized dean of scholarly Zen studies in Japan; Philip Yampolski, who later made translations of *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* as well as of works by Hakuin; Gary Snyder, poet and environmental activist; and Walter

Nowick, who later established his own *Zendo* in Maine. To fulfill Sokei-an's charge to her, Ruth Fuller Sasaki herself helped produce *The Record of Rinzai*, *The Recorded Sayings of Layman Pang* and the important compendium of Zen scholarship, *Zen Dust*, with Miura Isshu Roshi and her research staff.

*The Zen Eye* brings together fifty-five of Sokei-an's talks. Mary Farkas, in both her introduction and in an afterward, gives a personal impression of Sokei-an's talks. He spoke in a deep voice. To begin each talk, Sokei-an uttered "[a]s is common with Japanese speakers, some sort of sound, midway between a purr and a growl" (167). He spoke with extreme slowness and apologized thus: "I beg your pardon for my slow speech. First, I must think about what I am going to say in English. Then I must carry out the *dharmakaya* itself before your eyes. So naturally I cannot speak as I would read a book" (ix). True to his *sanzen* training, Sokei-an did not describe but become the subject of his talk. Says Mary Farkas, "Sometimes he would be a huge mountain, sometimes a lonely coyote on the plains; at other times a willowy Chinese princess or a Japanese geisha would appear before our eyes" (167). He described his own talks without pretension. "I am like an artist... who makes pictures in the sand. I am happy doing this. In a few minutes the waves will come and erase them" (x).

A traditional Japanese monastery roshi lectures only on koan texts such as the *Mumonkan* (*Gateless Barrier*) or the *Hekigan-roku* (*Blue Cliff Record*) expounding all the cases in order. Sokei-an did not do this. He was a Zen master who had received his training as a layman, not as a monastery monk. In fact, in choice of topic, few of the talks collected in *The Zen Eye* deal directly with what we now think are the traditional topics of Zen lectures: koans, emptiness, the Zen patriarchs (Rinzai's name is mentioned not even once). Instead, Sokei-an seems to have been fascinated by philosophy in general and by Yogacara Buddhism, the "Mind Only" school, in particular. Of his early interest, he writes, "in my seventeenth year I had come upon two words—'subjective' and 'objective'—'Ha!' After that my brain flowed like water, and I became a no-good boy for daily life" (12). Six talks treating consciousness are grouped together in this collection (26-49) and the series of talks on meditation (50-78) express a recognizable mind-only outlook. Later talks speak openly of Yogacara Buddhism, the Buddhism of "Mind Only" (126-7) and some talks even attempt to explain *alaya* consciousness (42-45, 102-6). He seems never to have tired of repeating this sort of argument:

The sound of this gong is created on the drum of your ear; there is no sound in the gong itself. Taste is produced on your tongue. It



does not exist in food. I do not need to explain more carefully, for science proves this.

... The blue sky, the green water, the pink flowers—these are only phenomena; they are the appearances of reality, not reality itself. When I was young and studied Western philosophy in school, I was amazed. I thought, "Western philosophers are thinking with our Buddhism." (26)

But Sokei-an's explanation is not that of the Western philosopher.

The Buddhist thinks the universe is eternal existence; it has never been created, it will never be destroyed. "... We think the universe is another name for infinite consciousness. There is nothing in the universe but consciousness, only consciousness exists. What is this gong? Consciousness. What is this fire? Consciousness." (31)

This is not ordinary consciousness for my birth and my death do not interfere at all with its uncreated, undestroyed existence (33). Can one step forth from ordinary consciousness into infinite consciousness?

There is only one key that opens the door to the new transcendental world. I can find no single word for it in English, but, using two words perhaps I can convey the meaning: shining trance. In that clear, crystallized trance—"Ztt!"—you enter the transcendental world. (13)

This is starting to sound more like Zen: "Ztt!"

Sokei-an spoke on a wide variety of topics. He gravitated towards explaining the very basic Buddhist concepts—the five *skandhas* (85-88), the three principles of *śīla*, *samādhi* and *prajña* (92-95), *dhyana* (119-121), the six *paramitas* (133-135), three Buddha-bodies (146-149, 150-153), inter-relatedness (162-163). His explanations are neat and precise. Of meditation, he writes:

The Buddha founded his religion upon samadhi. His object of meditation was his own mind. He did not meditate upon any external object, upon thoughts or words or ideas. He meditated simply upon mind—mind from which had been extracted every thought, every image, every concept. He paid no attention either to the outside or to the inside; he meditated upon his own mind. Perhaps we should say that mind meditated upon itself, for, in true Buddhist meditation, mind by itself is the meditator and at the same time the object of meditation. (55)

Then later he says:

Zen meditation is not to meditate *on* something, but to handle the mind as though it doesn't belong to you (70).

His images grip the imagination. In an aside while speaking on the importance of physical posture to meditation, he says:

I might add that it is not good to look from the corner of the eyes. I once met a Zen master in Japan who was like a wild boar when he looked at you. He never turned his head or moved his eyes to look at something. When he turned, he moved from the waist, turning his whole upper body. (58)

It is the originality of these insights that conveys the strong feeling of authenticity.

Sokei-an saw the many ways in which the West and the "Orient" contrast and complement each other. In a talk entitled, "A Japanese in New York City" (6-8), apparently triggered by a conversation with D.T. Suzuki, Sokei-an spoke against the stereotypical division between the materialistic, urban West and the spiritual, natural Orient. In fact, he inverted the usual fixed image and claimed that nature is material and the city is spiritual.

When nature has not been thrown into the melting pot of the human mind and molded into a solid shape of form like a city, it is just "material." The wide plains, the miles of virgin country with no cattle, no fish—that is material, because it has not been touched by the human brain, has had no association with human beings. (8)

For him, city life encapsulated the Buddhist life of non-ego and cooperation.

To live in New York, you must pay a very high price: you can only satisfy your desires cooperatively with your neighbors. The civilization of cooperation really makes you develop non-ego. In order to satisfy your desires, you must develop the non-ego attitude.... From my standpoint, this New York civilization is Buddhist; we do not need to do anything more than enjoy it. (8)

So also he found Buddhism and Christianity complementary. Although the Buddha in his time taught compassion and sympathy, Sokei-an found these qualities missing in the practice of early Buddhist monks.

They emphasized Nirvana so strongly that they forgot about human beings; they forgot about love. Christ came and completed the side of Buddhism that Buddhism did not touch. (23)

And he considered himself fortunate to have encountered Christianity.

Two thousand years ago, Christ spoke the word "love" aloud, and people's minds awoke. Love, in its purity, freed their minds.

I am happy that I, one human being, understand these two wonderful religions of the East and West, whose common basis is non-ego. (24)

Seen from the sophisticated perspective of the 1990s, Sokei-an's views may seem naive but in their innocence, they escape the stereotypical positions associated with Orientalism and with political correctness.

Sokei-an gives us many more lessons in this little volume. Where most modern Westerners find the Buddhist notion of karma and rebirth unacceptable, Sokei-an explains karma in terms of four concrete attitudes of performing daily life: in every act, compensate by paying back old debts, do everything in accordance with nature, act without expecting a result, live in accordance with the *dharma* (111-114). Where Zen teachers these days are wont to speak of just letting go of attachment and preconception, old-fashioned Sokei-an talks of how to develop the qualities of a human being: love, duty, propriety, intelligence, confidence (136-140).

One element of these edited talks bothers me—their poetry and their eloquence. The many passages quoted above display a fine feel for aptness of expression, strong imagery, the rhythm of English words, the poetry of colloquial speech. Could a native Japanese person have developed such a sensitivity for English as to create so elegant a phrase as "shining trance"? Sokei-an's students took notes at his lectures when he first gave them in the 1930s. The collated lecture notes were worked up into rough drafts by other editors and some drafts were then further polished for publication in *Zen Notes* or *Cat's Yawn*. For publication of this book half a century later, even further editing was done. Mary Farkas names fully 23 people who helped in the task of editing. With so much editing, one wonders how much of the beauty of English expression originated with Sokei-an and how much was contributed by his many well-meaning editors.

Nonetheless, regardless of these qualms, we rejoice at having this reappearance of Sokei-an. In the tradition of First Zen Institute people who perform a great deed before they die, Mary Farkas has given us *The Zen Eye*. Squinty-eyed Sokei-an glares at us from the back cover of

the book. Thank her for giving us the chance to stare back. Perhaps the Zen eye with which Sokei-an squints at us is the eye with which we squint at him.

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*The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea.* By Robert E. Buswell, Jr. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. xvi + 264 pp. Plates, Appendix, Glossary of Sinitic Logographs, Works Cited, and Index. Cloth: \$29.95, paper: \$12.95.

This detailed, first-hand report gives new insight to those who are interested in Zen Buddhism particularly in contemporary Korea. Most Western readers who are interested in Zen have long paid attention to works of D.T. Suzuki, Alan Watts, and so on. This book will challenge them to reconsider that there are different and significant aspects of Zen tradition that have been completely overlooked in the West. Having spent five years as a Buddhist monk in Korea, Robert Buswell has brought his personal knowledge of Korean Buddhism to the West, where persons of such experience are rare. Indeed, this book grew, for the most part, out of his experience at Songgwang-sa, one of the largest monasteries in Korea, during the period 1974 to 1979.

*The Zen Monastic Experience* is organized in nine chapters, preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion, epilogue, and appendix. The introduction treats the relationship between Zen monasticism and the context of belief. Buswell first stresses that "without access to Zen's monastic life—the context within which that thought evolved—much of the import of Zen beliefs and training may never be known, or at least may be prone to misinterpretation" (p. 5). He then directs Westerners' attention in a new direction: Korean Zen—known as Sŏn—is also a tradition worthy of far more attention than it has gleaned to date in Western scholarship. Indeed, given the pervasive emphasis on Japanese forms of Zen found in Western literature on the tradition (as indicated by our common English usage of the Japanese pronunciation "Zen" to represent all the national branches of the school), we may forget that there are other, equally compelling and authentic approaches to Zen thought and practice found elsewhere in Asia" (p. 6). Buswell confesses the personal impetus behind this book: "Zen as I was

experiencing it as a monk living in a monastic community just did not quite mesh with Zen as I found it described in this literature" (p. 8). He wanted to point out discrepancies between Western portrayals of Zen and the testimony of its living tradition in Korea. He believes that "Buddhism weaves doctrine, praxis, and lifeway together into an intricate tapestry... each aspect intimately interconnected with the other... Without understanding the regimen of monastic life, we have little basis upon which to comprehend the meaning of enlightenment—Zen's home run" (pp. 9-10). In addition, he deals in a scholarly manner with the value of modern traditions in understanding Zen, marginalizations of the Buddhist monastic tradition, and stereotypes of monks.

In chapter one, Buswell provides a brief background of the development of Buddhism in Korea from its introductory stage to the present, including a table of the "Census of Korean Buddhism (1972-1983)" (p. 35). He relates Zen tradition in various East Asian countries—China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam—"each of which has its own independent history, doctrine, and mode of practice. While each of these traditions has developed independently, all have been heavily influenced by the Chinese schools of Ch'an (Kor. Sŏn; Jpn. Zen; Viet. Thiên)... have considerable synergy between them... Continuities and transformations between the different strands must be both kept in mind in order to understand the character of the 'Zen Tradition'" (p. 21). He outlines the structure and activities of the Chogyŏ Order, the major and most traditional Buddhist order in Korea, focusing on four *Ch'ongnim* where separate compounds for Sŏn meditation, doctrinal study, precepts studies, and Pure Land practice have been established: Haein at Haein-sa, Chogyŏ at Songgwang-sa, Yŏngch'uk at T'ongdo-sa, and Tŏksung at Sudŏk-sa.

In chapter two Buswell describes the daily and annual schedules of Zen monasteries, based on *an'ger*, formal religious retreats in summer and winter, with ceremonies and commemorative services including Buddha's Birthday and New Year's celebration. Buswell describes all events in detail: exactly when and how they are prepared and managed. (Korean Buddhist monasteries use the lunar calendar for their traditional events.)

Chapter three deals with Songgwang-sa and Master Kusan (1908-1983): The history of the monastery and the life of the master. Buswell depicts the general layout of Korean monasteries focusing on Songgwang-sa. He introduces Kusan, his own teacher, as a model of a Zen master in contemporary Korea.

Chapter four talks about a monk's early career from *hangja* (postulant) and *samī* (Skt. 'śramaṇera, novice) to *pigu* (Skt. bhikṣu, a fully ordained monk). Buswell discusses the motivation for being ordained

and depicts the process and ceremonies of ordination. He also touches upon family ties after ordination, secession from the order, postordination career, pilgrimage, and monks' clothing. He provides psychological and sociological analyses of these topics.

Chapter five describes the support division of the monastery: positions and their functions in the organization. The personnel include the abbot, the office monks, the kitchen staff, and lay workers. Buswell sketches preparation of meals, group work in the monastery and in the fields, such as rice-planting, *kimch'i* and *meju* making, fruit picking, and construction. In the next chapter Buswell discusses relations with the laity focusing on the Puril Hoe, Songgwang-sa's lay association. He stresses that the lay organization is not only important to provide support to the monastery but also to disseminate Buddhism into the society.

In chapter seven, the practice of Zen meditation is described. Following a brief history of Zen in Korea, Buswell explains the technique of *kanhwa Sŏn* (Ch. k'an-hua Ch'an, the Sŏn approach of observing the critical phrase), with a detailed review of Kusan's teaching. In the next chapter, Buswell covers training in the meditation hall. He discusses the place of the meditation hall in Korean Buddhist practice throughout its history, particularly the rules listed in *Chŏngsu pyŏlchŏn Sŏnjong hwalgu ch'amsŏn kyŏlsa sŏnjŏn-mun* (Promulgation of a Religious Society That Will Cultivate Diligently Sŏn Meditation on the Live Word of the Separately Transmitted Sŏn School) of Sŏn master Yongsŏng (1868-1937) (pp. 164-165). Buswell covers the schedule of the modern meditation hall, entering the meditation hall, and decorum in it. He also describes the formal rules of the meditation hall and life of the hall such as sleeping, bathing, nursing sickness, and attending the fortnightly lecture. He also depicts a session of intensive meditation and ascetic practices, for instance, eating only raw foods, fasting, never lying down to sleep, silence, finger burning, self-immolation. He also delineates special retreats and the end of the retreat.

Chapter nine deals with the officers of the meditation compound, such as *Pangjang* or *Chosil* (Sŏn Master), *Yuna* (rector), *Yŏlchung* (succentor), *Ch'ŏngjung* (disciplinarian), *Chikse* (proctor), *Cjijŏn* (verger), *Hwakae* (firemaker), *Tagak* (tea boys) and so on. Buswell describes the process of selection and the responsibilities and function of each officer in the community. In the conclusion, Buswell suggests a reappraisal of Zen religious experience by Western academia. He points out that limited understanding of Zen has caused it to be seen by Western scholars as literally iconoclastic, bibliophobic, and antinomian. From his experience, he shows that: the Sŏn monks of Korea are decidedly not ignorant of Buddhist doctrinal teachings, and have much in common with their



Buddhist counterparts elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Moreover, Zen monks have generally been depicted in Western literature as oriented toward aesthetics, manual labor, or both; Korean Zen practitioners, however, do not do much labor and do not pay much attention to artistic activities, but concentrate on meditation.

In the epilogue, Buswell adds more information which he obtained in Korea after he had returned to secular life. After he settled down in the United States as a lay scholar, he visited Korea several times and observed a number of changes. First he reports the story of Zen master Kusan's passing away. Then he talks about new leadership in Songgwang-sa, and many changes in the surroundings, including new buildings constructed in the monastery, tourism, and other activities that have influenced the monastic atmosphere.

The appendix is Buswell's English translation of principle chants used in Korean monasteries, which are composed in literary Chinese, but pronounced in Korean: Morning Bell Chant, the Evening Bell Chants, Homage to the Three Jewels, the *Heart Sutra*, Formal Meal Chanting, Chanting at Formal Dharma Lectures, and *Thousand Hands Sutra*. They are performed at daily and occasional services everywhere.

As the above summary shows, *The Zen Monastic Experience* covers many aspects of Buddhist practice in Korea and in offers invaluable sources to Westerners. In addition to his previous works, *The Korean Approach to Zen: The Collected Works of Chinul* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), *The Formation of Ch'an Ideology in China and Korea: The Vajrasamadhi-Sutra, a Buddhist Apocryphon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), and others, Buswell, through this unique field study, surely has contributed much to Western academia by providing detailed data about Buddhism in Korea and more broadly in East Asia.

So far as this reviewer knows, this book is the first work in English based on personal experience at a Korean Buddhist monastery. The book is greatly strengthened by the author's proficiency in all the relevant languages—Korean, Chinese, Sanskrit—and his thorough documentation. There are also valuable photographic plates. However, it is unfortunate that the author was unable to spend extended time at other monasteries or study under other Zen masters, because Songgwang-sa was the only major monastery that permitted foreigners to participate fully in the regular practice.

As a Korean Buddhist monk, with my own experience of practicing Sōn meditation at many different monasteries throughout South Korea for more than ten years, including about two years at Songgwang-sa, I can say, briefly but with confidence, that Buswell's reports in *Zen*

*Monastic Experience* are basically accurate. I believe that all readers of this book, not only scholars, could enrich their religious experience by learning more of this living Asian monastic tradition and its cultivation of the spiritual life.

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*The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava*, by Yeshe Tsogyal.  
Boston: Shambhala, 1993; 321 pp.; paper: \$17.00

*Dakini Teachings: Padmasambhava's Oral Instructions to Lady Tsogyal*,  
by Yeshe Tsogyal. Boston: Shambhala, 1990; 210 pp.; paper: \$18.00

Both books, Padmasambhava's life story and his oral instructions, were written by his closest disciple and consort Yeshe Tsogyal (757-817 C.E.). She was one of the few women in Buddhism who have been accepted as official lineage holders, or "matriarchs" as they might be called in the East-Asian context.

The biography already contains many of Padmasambhava's teachings, but the second collection records more of them. As both sets of teachings reflect basic Tibetan Buddhist doctrine and are written in the same style by the same author, they will be discussed as one unit.

Padmasambhava, or "Guru Rinpoche" (Precious Guru) as the Tibetans simply call him, is considered the single most important person in bringing Buddhism to Tibet. Only this great sorcerer knew how to subdue the armies of Tibetan demons, gods, spirits, subterranean beings, etc. that stood opposed to the Holy Dharma. The Tibetans hold him in such high esteem that they call him the Second Buddha. And not only that, it is even said that he never died. He is believed to remain somewhere in meditative absorption and will return one day to instruct disciples.

It is difficult to summarize Padmasambhava's life story because it is written based on a vision of reality that is diametrically opposed to Western concepts. It defies all logic, Western and Eastern. Underlying the story is the view that there are different coexisting levels of reality, often called "outer, inner, and secret." (Which may provisionally be ex-

plained as material, psychological, and ultimate/spiritual.) What is true on one level of reality may not be true on another, yet each has its own validity.

If one wishes to get acquainted with this paradigm and would like to learn the juggling of different levels of reality, these kinds of Tibetan story books are a good exercise.

Imagine this: Actually the master's nature is beyond life and death. Nevertheless he took on form as an emanation (*nirmanakaya*) of Buddha Amitabha, embodying the activity and compassion of all buddhas. As such he took birth in the first half of the eighth century as the prince of Uddiyana, a kingdom to the northwest of India. Though actually he was born on a lotus flower on a lake, without having been "defiled" by a woman's womb, he also manifested as ordinary birth from his mother's body, in order to "tame" human beings. Though he needed no teacher to accomplish all levels of tantric practice, he pretended to train under a guru, in order to set a good example. Because of their previous karmic connection, he had to follow King Trisong Deutsen's invitation to Tibet. How long you believe he stayed there depends on your faith. "Faithless people" (e.g., historians?) say he stayed only a few months, but the faithful believe he stayed fifty-six years. Besides enlisting demons in the services of the dharma, he also helped construct the first Buddhist temple and monastery in Tibet, taught, translated, visited, and consecrated holy places all over Tibet, and wrote and concealed texts for future generations. The biography ends when he returns to India to subdue some more demons.

These two books reveal two sides of Guru Rinpoche. A little more than half the life story emphasizes the tantric magician who rides on beams of sunlight, brings down meteors on his enemies, and subdues all evil forces. In the rest of his biography and the *Dakini Teachings*, he appears as a regular dharma teacher. He instructs his students on all levels: in outer discipline and morals, in the inner attitude of love and compassion, and in the secret view of emptiness. Although he had many consorts in the course of his life, he is a strict and orthodox teacher (which is no contradiction for an enlightened tantrika). Padmasambhava is very concerned about people breaking their vows and practicing virtuous conduct.

Life stories of enlightened masters are a well-loved genre of central importance in Tibetan literature. They are usually written by a close disciple, after the master's passing away, and comprise much of the guru's spiritual legacy. Two things make them valuable.

First, they reveal how Buddhism is applied to and affects real life situations. They paint the image of a Buddhist culture beyond the philosophical doctrine. For example, when it comes to karma and reincarna-

tion in the scholarly context, all kinds of theoretical hair-splitting distinctions between Hindu and Buddhist concepts can be conceived. But when we read about what it implies for people's lives, such subtle differentiations become quite insignificant.

In "The Lotus-Born" for example, Padmasambhava, the King Trisong Deutsen, and the Khenpo Bodhisattva, had been three Indian brothers in a former life. In memory of their mother they had built a stupa and prayed that they might spread the dharma in their future lives. That karma brings them back together in the Land of Snow, as the Tibetan king and the two Indian masters. They are bound together until their former prayers are fulfilled and Buddhism is established in Tibet. Would a Hindu tell this story differently than Yeshe Tsogyal does? Probably not. When it comes to how karma affects our lives, it doesn't matter whether we see it from the Hindu or the Buddhist perspective.

Secondly, life stories are to inspire our own practice. As opposed to dry treatises, they put the teachings into a human context that serves as an ideal example practitioners can strive to follow. They usually describe the guru's path to enlightenment with all its very human joys, trials and tribulations that lead to final victory. Padmasambhava's life story, however, is different. Most of the account is given from the perspective that the master was already enlightened before he even descended into our world. Since Tibetans like to see their great masters as emanations of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and dakinis, many biographies start out this way. Nevertheless, most of them proceed to portray a truly human development. Yeshe Tsogyal however, only once, in quickly passing, describes her master as anything like an ordinary person with human emotions: He is said to shed tears when he sees his parents crying about him being exiled from their kingdom. None of the other greater and lesser catastrophes in his life seem to touch his heart. Maybe, being a woman, the author was taught so well to be ever humble, that she simply couldn't get herself to depict the great master as an ordinary human at more than one point in his life.

There are many biographies that are more inspiring and more suitable for non-experts than these two books; for example those of Yeshe Tsogyal herself, of Naropa, Marpa, and Milarepa. An anthology edited by Tsultrim Allione of Tibetan female masters' biographies was published under the title "Women of Wisdom." All of these are highly recommended. For historians however, Padmasambhava's biography should represent a valuable source. It contains lists of the pre-Buddhist Bon pantheon whose gods he subdued one and all. It reveals a lot of historical details, from intrigues and power struggles in India and Tibet, to the etiquette at the Tibetan court; not to mention the long lists of who translated which texts for what purpose.

The *Dakini Teachings* are a selection representing one fifth of what has been found of Padmasambhava's oral instructions to Lady Tsogyal, chosen by the translator Erik Pema Kunsang. The original was written in a secret code language called "Dakini script" and hidden for future generations. "Oral instructions" is a very serious term in Tantric Buddhism. It has to do with keeping the most profound teachings secret in order to heighten the power of their impact on the aspirant when they are revealed. Secrecy can either be accomplished by not writing or publishing certain works, or by writing them in a "self-secret" (literally: "locked inside") manner. The latter implies that it is impossible to understand the written words, unless they are accompanied by oral instructions from a qualified teacher to an initiated student.

The translator of the *Dakini Teachings* honored this tradition by selecting only those instructions for translation that are often given to the general public. Thus, much of what we find here are the usual admonitions: be good, fear suffering and death, renounce the world, family, friends, and homeland, have great devotion to the dharma, and don't waste time but hurry diligently towards enlightenment. Sometimes there are nice surprises: for example Padmasambhava's urging to study and respect all schools of Buddhism to avoid falling into sectarianism. Other times the surprises are less pleasant, even sad; for example when he tells women: "Since, due to negative karma, your birth is inferior, you may not be able to act as a learned preceptor." Or: "A bad husband is your karmic residual, so give him what he wishes and do not be contemptuous." (*The Lotus-Born*, pp. 161 and 174.) Especially coming from a man who is famous for having had many enlightened consorts and is so concerned about keeping vows, this is disappointing. (One of the tantric vows is not to look down upon women.)

Yet there are also parts of these books which are likely to be very confusing if one has not received teachings before. Because of the aforementioned issue of secrecy and the tradition never to study a religious book without a teacher who is fully qualified to interpret it, Yeshe Tsogyal made no effort to make these teachings understandable to the non-initiated. The translator's glossary and excellent, comprehensible translation help. Many issues become clear, yet others are only hinted at or expressed with the typically Buddhist admiration for numbers. For example: "You should receive (the bodhisattva vow) from a master who has realized the twofold selflessness through training in the three types of knowledge, and is thus free from the eight worldly concerns." (*Dakini Teachings*, p. 51.)

These selections of Yeshe Tsogyal's works are more of a quick refresher course for reviewing all one has learned in years of training

than an introduction to any particular subject. They could be very useful as reference books or guidelines and syllabi for teaching programs. Her books should be part of every Buddhist library. Because of the lady's and Padmasambhava's historical importance, these are essential documents for the study and preservation of Tibetan Buddhism.

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*Aikido and the Harmony of Nature* by Saotome Mitsugi. Translated by Patricia Saotome. Forward by David Jones. Boston and London: Shambhala, 1993. xvi + 250pp. Paper: \$25.00.

In the twenty-five years since the death of the founder of Aikido, Ueshiba Morihei (1883-1969), interest in this martial art has spread around much of the world. There have also appeared a number of books detailing the life story of "O Sensei" (meaning "Great Teacher", the term is the Aikido community's title for Ueshiba) or the technical, "how-to" aspect of performing the various Aikido techniques. Now there is a most timely book which, as far as I am aware, is totally unlike any which has preceded it.

Shihan (a master teacher who has attained at least the rank of sixth Dan) Saotome Mitsugi was one of the last *uchi deshi* of the Founder. *Uchi deshi* literally means an inner student or disciple. He or she lives with the teacher and performs many personal services, such as arranging transportation, carrying luggage, preparing bath water, and so on. A long-term proposition, it is an honor to be chosen, for the student is accorded an opportunity to thoroughly learn the subject and to become, in effect, a child of, and successor to, the teacher.

From such a highly-qualified individual comes this unique work. It is unique because it addresses the "why" of Aikido. Saotome Sensei reveals herein the life history, philosophy, and insights of the Founder, all of which combined to lead O Sensei to a profound understanding of the nature of Nature, of the nature of reality. This understanding helped him to see clearly how Nature acts and reacts in different situations. Nature does not compete; it does not aggress; it simply is. There are explained in this work many of the processes of Nature. Yet, they are all secondary to an understanding of the one process that is "essential"



to the workings of this Nature in whose midst we live, yet which we often ignore, to our peril. That process is harmony.

The founder clearly believed that humanity has, by and large, lost the understanding of such reality. As a result, we often set out to tame nature, to master it, to "use" it. Yet we too often do not understand what it is we seek to tame. As a result of our poor understanding, we often find ourselves in situations of conflict - with Nature, with other humans, and with ourselves. Saotome Sensei helps us to understand the workings of Nature, the great insights of Ueshiba Morihei, and the means by which Aikido finds the harmony which exists in every situation of potential conflict.

He does this by a discussion of these processes of Nature. It is quite evident that the author has undertaken a solid investigation of these processes by using physics, chemistry, biology and astronomy - at a minimum. For example, he discusses the carbon-nitrogen-oxygen cycle of nuclear energy production in stars and how Nature uses the spiral shape is the electromagnetic vibration of light, in the movements of the earth and sun, and in the structure of amino acids and proteins - the latter being essential to life.

Next is explained how these scientific processes are useful for understanding the relationship of religion and science. Study of the latter can aid in comprehending the importance of symbolic truths of the former. The author states that religious myth is ancient wisdom, is the "first form of science" (p. 59), and is most useful for fostering a code of morality. However, looking to science alone for answers to the great questions of life is as unfulfilling as examining only mythic stories. Science too often divides knowledge, such that the original question may well be lost.

The author then proceeds to show how the understanding of such processes served as the basis for the development of Aikido. The goal of Aikido is nothing less than the promotion of a deep understanding of, and appreciation for, the balance, the harmony of Nature, and its Creator. Ueshiba Sensei clearly believed in, and spoke of, God. As is explained here, people of different cultures often have a different concept of what "God" means. Given that O Sensei's background was Japanese, and his life was shaped by Shinto religious traditions, his image of the Creator proceeds from, but is not limited to, those traditions.

Also addressed are the realities of being human, including the very characteristic of aggression, which helped our species to survive in its long development. This inherent characteristic is not to be denied or repressed, but acknowledged and redirected to productive and life-enhancing ends. Saotome Sensei presents a summary of aggression in human development, the evolution of *bujutsu* (military skills) in Japan, and how the latter was often subverted to the former.

Proceeding from a clear view of reality, O Sensei fashioned a Way, a model for life, to have meaning for all people. He sought to better the world demonstrably - not to escape it. Harmony is the method so chosen. An entire chapter describes the workings of harmony in nature. However, what is described is what truly exists, not what we wish were so. Individuals tend to distort what they see through the filter of ego so, for example, we tend to equate "harmony" with "no conflict." Existence, as depicted herein, is, however, a dynamic spiral, encompassing both conflict and harmony. Nature is always flexible and eventually returns to a balance.

Aikido is a process of retraining human instinct to more clearly understand our relationship to all that exists. Beginning on a physical level, it goes beyond mere intellectualization and moves into the very consciousness of humanity. It is in the demanding training, the sharing of experiences, stress and frustration, the learning how to trust and depend on your partners that one develops strong bonds of respect, concern, and compassion for others. In the learning of each technique is the understanding of how energy operates in the universe and in our own bodies.

The book discusses what Aikido is not. It is not a game or a sport. It is not competitive. We must understand competition to be potentially constructive and to function as an outlet for aggression. We must also realize that competition often quickly becomes excessive, producing frustration, pettiness, anger and aggression as indeed we see all around us in much of society.

While it may appear a paradox, the process of studying conflict in order to achieve harmony, under the personal direction and guidance of a legitimate teacher, is crucial for the student's development. It is simply too easy for many students, in many areas of training, to fixate on developing power and strength, heading off in the wrong direction. Aikido does address human maturation and personality development. O Sensei was directly concerned about the sort of person to whom he would transmit his insights, his knowledge. Years ago, any potential student of his was required to supply letters of recommendation from two reliable sponsors before they were allowed to begin training. In all my years of martial arts training, in the United States and abroad, with several famous teachers, never before had I seen or heard of a teacher's requiring such recommendations.

The book recounts many of Saotome Sensei's personal experiences as an inner disciple, and some of his conversations with O Sensei. The last chapter discusses the *dojo* (literally, the place of the Way.) Included are very useful sections on "Rules of the Dojo," "Rules of Training," and "Proper Dojo Etiquette."

In addition, the book contains many photographs and the author's own drawings, illustrating both particular techniques and the processes of Nature. Calligraphy is used to great effect to depict the names of techniques or concepts. Translations of several lectures by Ueshiba Morihei to his then *uchi deshi* are very interesting and insightful.

*Aikido and the Harmony of Nature* is a most welcome addition to the spectrum of works dealing with Aikido. People seeking more in the way of Aikido background, or explanation of Aikido techniques, would do well to consult the works of John Stevens: *Aikido: The Way of Harmony* (Shambhala, 1984) or *The Sword of No Sword* (Shambhala, 1984.) Most useful is *A Beginner's Guide to Aikido*, by Larry Reynosa and Joseph Billingsiere (R&B Publishing Company, 1989.)

In his preface, Saotome Sensei states that perhaps many people may find this book difficult to comprehend, due to his approach. In this particular work, he is less concerned with self-defense techniques and more concerned with "...the true meaning of the teachings of Morihei Ueshiba..." (xi). This was the teaching of O Sensei. This is the reason for the writing of this book.

It is a terrific book. The authors approach is the strength of the book. He has accomplished all he set out to do. Perhaps some novice martial artists will not find in it those explanations of the techniques for which they are searching. As related above, there exist other fine books concentrating on this aspect. Perhaps some people will not appreciate what has been set down herein.

Yet, I suspect anyone who has diligently trained in martial arts for more than a year or two will appreciate this book. Anyone who is familiar with the reality of many, if not most, martial arts competitions (i.e., tournaments) and has been disgusted with the all-too-common "...strutting display of childish ego..." (p. 138) will respond to this book.

Another strength of Aikido, well-explained in the book, is the responsibility of the martial artist to protect life - all life, even that of the attacker. Failure to defend the self or another because of weakness contributes to the crime of the attacker. However, should you be attacked and kill the attacker, you are also guilty of destroying life. Aikido posits another possibility - defending yourself but controlling the attacker, effectively neutralizing him or her.

My one negative comment about the book is a minor one. Romanized Japanese terms are sometimes used in captions, several pages before the term is explained in the text. The reader who does not understand such a term's meaning the first time it is encountered must search through the text for the meaning. There exists no index or glossary of these terms.

The reader can find influences from Taoism, Buddhism, and Shinto, and how pertinent they all are to this Way of living. For that is what

Aikido really is. As the author writes, "The objective of Aikido training on the mat is to carry that training into every part of your life. If it stops with the technique it has no real value." (p. 237)

An oversize, expensive paperback, this book should nonetheless grace the library of any practitioner of Aikido. Its value is not, however, to be seen as applying only to Aikido students. Other martial artists who examine it may well find themselves deciding to switch affiliations. Anyone with an interest in Asian culture and philosophy will also find it interesting and entertaining. Over the years I have heard many people ask, "What is Aikido?" Saitome Mitsugi has provided us with a well-written and thorough answer.

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*Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* By Miranda Shaw. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994. pp. 291. \$29.95.

*Passionate Enlightenment* is the first book in English to address a too long ignored area of Buddhist history, namely, the contributions of women to Indian Buddhist tantra. It has long been asserted by many respected scholars of Buddhism that men were the primary practitioners of Indian Buddhist tantra, with women playing only a marginal and sexually degraded role. Female tantric practitioners have widely been characterized as "prostitutes" or "witches" who were "depraved and debauched." It has been asserted that they were mere "ritual objects" to be used and cast aside. This view has been almost unanimously held among Western scholars (the notable exception being Herbert V. Guenther). This book is a passionate defense of women's role in Indian Buddhist tantra, aimed at disproving scholarly assertions of women's marginal role.

Miranda Shaw was first inspired to question the scholarly assertions of when she observed the raw power of traditional artistic representations of female tantric practitioners and deities. She points out that "these female figures, with their exuberant air of passion and freedom, communicate a sense of mastery and spiritual power" (p. 3). She

felt the presence of such positive feminine imagery was a strong indication that women fully participated in the formation of the Buddhist tantric tradition.

Shaw's book draws on over forty texts written by women which she discovered while researching in India, Nepal, and Japan. She also examines and reinterprets the major *yoginī-tantras*, the classic tantric texts which "describe spiritual companionship between men and women and sexual union as a vehicle of religious transformation" (p. 14). In addition, she draws on a number of interpretive commentaries. From these sources, Shaw weaves a vivid portrait of women's participation in Indian Buddhist tantric life.

Shaw begins by outlining the historical framework of Buddhist tantra. Tantric Buddhism arose in India during the Pāla period (eighth through twelfth centuries) as a new movement within Mahāyāna Buddhism. At this time, Mahāyāna was a flourishing intellectual movement. Many richly endowed monasteries produced scholar-monks who wrote great philosophical works. Academic success was a "direct route to tremendous wealth, political influence, and social prestige" (p. 20).

According to Shaw, tantric Buddhism arose as a reform movement, in an attempt to return to Mahāyāna's vaunted universalism. Tantric teachings built on Mahāyāna philosophy, with innovations only in technique and practice. Tantric practice did not require the purified atmosphere of an exclusive monastic institution, but instead took place amidst the tumult of lay life, in towns and in the wilderness. It was an egalitarian lay movement which was open to people from all walks of life, from royalty to craftspeople to beggars. It claimed that enlightenment could be found in all activities and all emotions. In direct contradiction to traditional monastic practice, tantrics "insisted that desire, passion and ecstasy should be embraced on the religious path.... They sought to master desires by immersion in them" (p. 21). Consonant with this position, "sexual intimacy became a major paradigm of Tantric ritual and meditation" (p. 21).

Shaw points out that the classic tantric texts never state that men are superior to women, but instead, tend to depict women as powerful, independent spiritual aspirants. Women are not defined in relation to men. However, male tantrics are enjoined to pay homage to women. Women should always be respected and honored. Men should always see women as the embodiments of Vajrayoginī, a female buddha. Denigrating attitudes towards women are criticized as being incompatible with the tantric path. Shaw recounts a number of tantric stories of men whose spiritual progress was severely hampered because they failed to be properly respectful of women.

Since sexual intimacy was a realm of tantric practice, male and female tantric practitioners practiced together. As Shaw describes it, their relationships were a weaving of mutual goals that strove for a perfect balance between the two partners. However, even while striving for balance, men sought female approval, while women were not enjoined to seek male approval.

Shaw claims that a careful reading of the sources leads to the conclusion that there were many women among tantric circles. She cites many examples of women who are described as having reached high levels of spiritual attainment. She also includes translations of some of the songs of attainment written by women. There are many records of women acting as gurus, spiritual mentors teaching both male and female students.

Shaw found that a number of important tantric practices were originally taught and written by women, including long life practices and fasting practices devoted to Avalokiteśvara, both of which are still frequently practiced by Tibetan Buddhists. In one chapter, Shaw describes as much as is known of the life stories of "female founders" and then explains the gist of the practices they began. Shaw paints vivid portraits of both the social contexts in which these women acted and the nature of the practices they were doing.

Next, Shaw has a chapter on tantric sexual union. She describes both the theory and the practice. This is clearly not a series of techniques for producing "good sex," but rather a subtle method of using one's physical energies to increase spiritual awakening. Her description makes it obvious that only advanced tantric practitioners could even hope to perform this practice correctly. As Shaw describes it, this practice cannot be done correctly unless *both* partners are highly realized practitioners, thus giving the lie to the old theory that the women who performed these rituals were nothing more than prostitutes or women of questionable morals who performed a merely physical service for male tantrics.

*Passionate Enlightenment* does a thorough job of addressing and refuting the many ill-informed, androcentric assertions which have been made regarding women's participation in Buddhist tantra. Shaw has found many important primary sources which were previously unknown or ignored. She gives vivid descriptions of women's participation in tantric life in India.

It is an enjoyable book to read. Shaw's writing style is flowing and often almost lyrical. She weaves a lovely picture of words, dealing with her many topics with sensitivity and passion. Her descriptions are clear, avoiding the obscurantism so common in scholarly work. The passages she translates have a poetic grace. The following is one example of her translations, a woman's song of enlightenment:



Hum! What do you think when you cry out in surprise?  
 What can distract you when you stare in amazement?  
 How can the sky be polished?  
 What does a butterlamp think?  
 The track of a water-bubble can't be found.  
 Upon waking, dream thoughts evaporate. (p. 95)

This book is clearly written with the intention of being accessible to a popular audience. It does not presuppose a great deal of knowledge about tantric Buddhism. (For those who are interested in learning more about this field, she includes a thorough bibliography.) In this work, Shaw seems primarily concerned with providing a coherent, seamless narrative. She does not explore all of the ambiguities, uncertainties, and contradictions which are actually present in the historical evidence. In the introductory chapter, Shaw states that "Exegetical and sectarian traditions do not evince unanimity on these issues" (p. 15). However, this is the only mention she makes of any contradictory voices in the tradition. Throughout the rest of the book, she makes it sound as though Buddhist tantra was uniformly egalitarian and affirming of women. One finds oneself wondering what constituted the lack of unanimity Shaw mentions in the introduction. A detailed exploration of the multiplicity of voices which are present in the exegetical and sectarian traditions would make a fascinating area for future study.

Another work Shaw might consider publishing is a translation of the various sources she discovered and utilized in creating *Passionate Enlightenment*. They are a crucially important collection of texts for this field of inquiry. Readers may find themselves wanting to read the entire sources, not merely the tantalizingly brief passages and summaries that were fit into this book. A translation would make these texts accessible to a wider audience and would take advantage of Shaw's gracefully poetic translation style.

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