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CONTENTS

I. ARTICLES

1. Is the Buddhist Notion of "Cause Necessitates Effect"
(*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) Scientific? by *A.D.P. Kalansuriya* 7
2. Chou Yung vs. Chang Jung (on *Śūnyatā*): the *Pen-mo*
Yu-wu Controversy in Fifth-Century China, by
Whalen Lai 23

II. SHORT PAPERS

1. Guṇaprabha's *Vinaya-sūtra* and his Own Commentary on
the Same, by *P. V. Bapat* 47
2. *Keci*, "Some," in a Pali Commentary, by *I. B. Horner* 52
3. Comments on Zen, by *M. Kiyota* 57
4. The Freudian Unconscious and *Bhavaṅga*, by *O. H. de A.*
Wijesekera 63

III. BOOK REVIEWS

1. Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective: Collected Ar-
ticles, by *H. V. Guenther* 67
2. Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism, by *Geshe*
Lhundup Sopa and *J. Hopkins* 69
3. Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice, by *M. Kiyota* 72
4. Choix de Documents tibétains conservés à la Bibliothèque
Nationale, complété par quelques manuscrits de l'India
Office et du British Museum; présentés par *Ariane*
Macdonald et *Yoshiro Imaeda* 76

IV. NOTES AND NEWS

- | | |
|--|----|
| 1. Presidential Address by Professor Gadjin M. Nagao | 79 |
| 2. Report on the Proceedings of the First Conference of the
I.A.B.S., Columbia University, New York, September
15-17, 1978 | 85 |
| 3. List of Members of I.A.B.S. | 92 |

V. OBITUARY

- | | |
|---|-----|
| Yamaguchi Susumu, by <i>Sakurabe Hajime</i> | 104 |
|---|-----|

III. BOOK REVIEWS

Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective, collected articles by Herbert V. Guenther. Emeryville, California: Dharma Publishing, 1977. 261 pp.

The publication of a scholar's "collected articles" invites us to view his development in a broad perspective and to consider on this basis his overall strengths and weaknesses. The eleven essays gathered here span a quarter-century, from 1950 through 1975, and cover topics ranging from the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sutra* to the philosophical background of Tantrism and the role of the spiritual teacher. It is clear from reading them that Herbert Guenther's aims and methods have been unusually consistent over a long span of time.

Prof. Guenther's professed aim, as expressed in the Introduction, always has been to offer "a key to the understanding of Buddhism as a living force of 'extensive becoming' that seems to constitute the nature of human thought and spiritual growth." Western scholars—even sympathetic ones—all too often have patronized Buddhist philosophy by regarding it 1) as hopelessly subordinated to mysticism and therefore not to be considered in the same light as our "more rigorous" Western systems, or 2) as hopelessly involuted and scholastic and therefore irrelevant to modern philosophical concerns. In the face of this, it has been the singular contribution of Prof. Guenther to have attempted to explain Buddhism in a manner consonant with recent developments in analytic and phenomenological philosophy: so certain is he of Buddhism's significance for modern thought that his attempt at elucidation has become nearly his exclusive preoccupation, to the point, it must be said, where the lines between scholarship and apologetics at times are blurred.

Those who are familiar with Prof. Guenther's work are aware that he has fashioned a theory of translation that evolves from the attempt to take absolutely seriously Buddhism's status as a "process" philosophy. He believes, in effect, that a world-view that admits of no static entities will be utterly misrepresented if its terms are translated "statically," i.e., on the basis of one foreign word's supposed equivalency to one English word. He passionately affirms (on page x) that "I never could

(nor will I ever) subscribe to a mood of 'definiteness' because this mood is soporific and geared to a static conception of man and the universe and to a mechanical mode of dealing with them. Although a definiteness with the deterministic interpretation displays a certain attractiveness which seems to be natural and more easy, this attractiveness is but the pervasive fallacy of assuming that everything is reducible to quantifiable platitudes."

Prof. Guenther, in short, is not going to apologize for what others regard as the turgidity or inconsistency of his translations: he regards it as his duty to remain true to the difficulty and elusiveness of the Buddhist concepts, and superficial readability be damned. Prof. Guenther cannot be accused of incoherence, but his essays do raise a number of disturbing problems.

The first, most eloquently posed by R.A. Stein in his Preface to the *Vie et Chants de 'Brug pa Kun legs le Yogin*, is that of the degree to which the *implications* of a word should be brought to bear on the word's *translation*. For example, should the Tibetan *rig-pa*, generally rendered as "knowledge," be translated as "Being *qua* being" and glossed as a "value-sustained cognition having a strongly aesthetic character," or again as a "peak experience," simply because these Western terms match Prof. Guenther's notion of their interpretation by certain schools? Prof. Guenther, needless to say, would maintain that it should, for the reasons outlined above, but it is clear that such non-literal translations and glosses leave us rather at the mercy of the translator's vision, for we have no way of separating the original statements from their overtones, since the rendering has *combined* the usually separate functions of translation and commentary.

The problems inherent in such an approach are particularly evident in Prof. Guenther because he has chosen so frequently to translate Buddhist vocabulary into the terms of such divergent Western disciplines as biology, systems analysis, astrophysics and Heideggerian philosophy. One is sorely tempted to ask, "Come on now, do the Buddhists *really* mean all those things?" It is by no means self-evident that they do, but in the absence of historical or contextual qualifications, there is no way of telling from Prof. Guenther's work that there can be any doubt.

Prof. Guenther has worked closely throughout his career with teachers from the 'Brug-pa bKa'-brGyud and rNying-ma schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and he has made a real contribution by his exposure through those schools of uniquely Tibetan contributions to Buddhist philosophy. Nevertheless, one feels uneasy reading the essays in this book, because one does not feel utterly confident that Prof. Guenther's translations are capturing the spirit (let alone the letter) of the bKa'-brGyud and rNying-ma thought that he discusses so extensively.

Even more disquieting is his tendency to homologize bKa'-brGyud and rNying-ma thought with Buddhism (or even "Eastern thought") in general. Running through most of these essays (and most of Prof. Guenther's work) is a vital concern with the distinction between Mind with a capital M (*rig-pa, sems-nyid*) and mind with a small m (*sems*). The former is a pure, spontaneous, aesthetic, intuitive awareness, ontologically expressible as "Being-in-itself," while the latter is everyday mental functioning: conceptual, rigid and very much "fallen" from the pure state to which, nevertheless, it *can* return. The parallels between such a view of man and that of Christianity (not to mention Bergson or Heidegger) are startling indeed, but we may at least concede that such a mythos is implied by many bKa'-brGyud and rNying-ma works. The suggestion, however, that such a scheme somehow is the heart and soul of Buddhism is, at the very best, arguable, and needs to be demonstrated rather than simply asserted or assumed.

In short, then, Prof. Guenther's greatest strength turns out to be his weakness as well: admirably, he seeks to demonstrate the relevance of Buddhist philosophy to the contemporary crisis of the soul, but in so doing he tends to substitute commentary for translation and philosophical generalization for contextual analysis. In doing that, he draws us far enough away from the work he is discussing that we no longer are certain where we stand, and can, in the end, but report that this does indeed seem to be "Tibetan Buddhism in Western perspective." In that, there may be great psychological value, but the scholarly and historical value often is problematic.

Regardless of the problems endemic to it, Prof. Guenther's is a provocative and sometimes insightful corpus, and his ideas deserve serious discussion. *Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective* will provide ammunition for both his supporters and his opponents and for that, in addition to its numerous interesting essays (especially the seminal "The Concept of Mind in Buddhist Tantrism," "The Levels of Understanding in Buddhism," and "The Philosophical Background of Buddhist Tantrism"), it bears reading.

Roger Jackson

Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism, by Geshe Lhundup Sopa and Jeffrey Hopkins, with a foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. New York: Grove Press, 1976. 164 pages.

Seven years ago, Herbert Guenther published the first substantial English translation of Tibetan *grub-mtha'* (*siddhanta*) literature, includ-