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III. BOOK REVIEWS

Histoire du Cycle De La Naissance et de la Mort, by Yoshiro Imaeda. Geneva-Paris: Librairie Droz, 1981. ii + 95 + 51 pages of reproduced plates of texts.

The caves of Tun H'uang bring us, via Paris, yet another fascinating piece of Buddhist history. Rare is it to find a piece of historical fact in the puzzle concerning the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet; even more rare is it to find these facts carefully presented, logically scrutinized, and textually documented. Mr. Imaeda's study of the *Story of the Cycle of Birth and Death* (*sKye shi 'khor ba'i chos kyi yi ge* or *sKye shi lo rgyus*), based on nine manuscripts from Tun H'uang, certainly manages to accomplish all these aims.

Tibetan historians, both traditional and otherwise, have determined with a measure of certainty the *fact* of the official introduction of Buddhism into the land of snows via the courts of the early kings (*chos rgyal*). And yet, apart from the fact *that* it entered, we can say very little about the *process* of entrance: the issues that the early Buddhist "missionaries" faced (both practically and in terms of soteriological adaptation). The text which Mr. Imaeda has chosen for his study is crucial in this regard: it is clearly an attempt on the part of one of these early "missionaries" to tackle what he considered to be some of the most important issues facing Buddhist doctrine in Tibet, issues which, if convincingly explained, meant a furtherance of the conversion of the populace to the new religion. In this sense the *Story* deals with pivotal doctrinal points, not so much soteriologically pivotal to Buddhism as tactically pivotal to the conversion process. The text shows the kind of religious questions that interested 8th-century Tibetans, the position of the native religion, and the Buddhist response. It is for this reason that the *Story* must be considered a work of crucial importance.

What are these pivotal points upon which the acceptance of Buddhism rested? The title itself shows us the principal one: death and the afterlife. Indeed, the vast portion of the work consists of the tale of a youth, Rin chen, "son of the gods," who, after his father's death, sets out in search of an answer to the question "what is one to do to make him come back to life, and to make it possible to find him; what is one to do to make him happy and content?" (all translations from the French my own). Rin chen, like Sudhana in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, encounters different spiritual teachers who, though

masters of different powers and accomplishments, are unable to answer the subtle questions of *karma*, death, and rebirth. Mr. Imaeda (pp. 19–31) goes to considerable length to compare Sudhana's and Rin chen's exploits, proving conclusively that the author of the *Story* was undoubtedly familiar with the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. But whereas Sudhana's 28th teacher is Avalokiteśvara, Rin chen's last *kalyāṇamitra* is the Buddha Śākyamuni, who tells him that (1) death is an inevitable outcome of *karma* and cannot be remedied as long as one is bound in *samsāra*, that even the highest gods must eventually die; (2) that funeral rites involving cremation, tossing the body in water, carrying it on a trident, saying Brahmanical mantras over it, sacrificing animals or any other type of heretical (*mu steg*) rite can in no way benefit the deceased. In this regard, one practice is mentioned that is somewhat baffling. Imaeda translates: "certain people say that if one practices the 'A-' gur-ma (= 'a-gur-ma, singers ?) on it (the corpse), and that if one realizes the meaning, that that remedies death" (p. 71) (*la las 'a 'gur ma'i chos/ nyams blang ni don spyod nas / shi ba di la phan zhes zer / -ina* obverse). Now to envision 'gur as *ngur* (song) is not too difficult, but what about the 'A? Might this be a reference to the 'A *dkar* practise of Bon?

Be that as it may, the general message is clear: that any non-Buddhist funeral practice, whether shamanistic, Brahmanical or otherwise, is ineffective. Thus the last message of Śākyamuni (3) that one should practice only Buddhist *dhāraṇīs* (*gzungs-sngags*) in order "to be reborn where one desires . . . escaping evil destinies . . . the dead are reborn into superior spheres" (p. 73). Though the main message is straightforward, there are underlying subtleties in the presentation which make it even more effective. Though Mr. Imaeda does not dwell on these, I think that they are worth mentioning.

(1) The "death of a god" theme, with which the work begins, is a clear assault, it seems to me, on the native religion, which emphasizes the worship of such deities. The statement that these gods (and therefore the Tibetan god-kings) are not beyond the grip of *karma* (and thus mortal), while the Buddha is neither bound by *karma* nor subject to death, is an indirect blow to the then Tibetan conception of perfection and immortality. Indeed, I think it not an exaggeration to say that the death of 'Od bar rgyal, the king, represents the death of the Tibetan shamanistic complex (of which the god-king motif is a part); and that Rin chen's quest is as much an implicit quest for a new religion as it is an explicit search for an answer to his questions concerning death.

(2) Magic is a central theme throughout this work, as it should

be in response to the shamanistic tendencies of 8th-century Tibetans. Thus, all of the great sages whom Rin chen meets are not only all Buddhists with great powers, capable in some cases of granting him mystical vision of some Buddhist scenario or other, but the Buddha himself is portrayed as the greatest magician of them all. Sitting in the midst of *bodhisattvas* who are also masters of magic (*byang chub sems dpa' 'phrul ba*), he performs miracles that leave poor Rin chen cringing in the crowd. This, probably more than his unique knowledge of the subtleties of death and rebirth, is what would set the Buddha apart from gods and men in the eyes of shamanistic Tibet. Granted that the point that the author is trying to make is just the opposite, i.e., that although magical power is shared by many, the questions of *karma*, death and rebirth can only be answered by the omniscient Buddha; and yet, the author of this work realized that this point could never fully be driven home in the Tibet of his day unless he made his Buddha the supreme figure in a hierarchy for which the Tibetans had a feeling. Thus the Buddha becomes the magician *par excellence* (a motif with extensive precedent in the Mahāyāna *sūtras*).

(3) Not only do the Buddhist *dhāraṇīs* protect one from unfortunate rebirth (the next best thing considering that death is inescapable as long as one remains in *samsāra*), but the blessing of the Three Jewels protects one from gods and demons (*lha 'dre*). Again, the author confronts an important issue of his day, viz., supernatural interference, and gives the Buddhist solution, faith in the *triratna*.

As regards the text itself, Mr. Imaeda concludes, rightfully I think, that it must have been the composition of "a man quite familiar with the Tibetan milieu" (p 80); that it was written circa 800 A.D. (p. 82); and that he considers it "as a sort of Tibetan apocryphal *sūtra*" (p. 81). Although the first two points are well founded, I would take exception with the last. First of all, if I gather correctly, none of the nine manuscripts call the work a *sūtra* (*mdo*). Granted that the term *chos kyi yi ge* (by which name it is known) seems to be one of the early terms translating the Sanskrit word *sūtra*, but it could also have had a wider meaning encompassing any Dharmic teaching. What is more, the term *lo rgyus* ("story" or "history") seems to place it in a category totally different from the *sūtras*, implying more of a sense of "fiction" or of "historical fiction." It would be fascinating to determine, based on techniques similar to those employed in Biblical criticism, whether it is the earlier manuscripts which are the "stories" and the later ones which are the *chos kyi yi ge* (lit., "dharma-words" or "dharma-letters"). If so, it would give us an

interesting model for *sūtrification*: from the fiction of story to the fact of *buddhavacanam*. However, as it stands, I think that the term “apocryphal *sūtra*” is simply too strong, since it seems to me that there is substantial doubt whether or not the work was meant to have been taken as a *sūtra* at all. As regards the fictitious Sanskrit title *Sai gra dar ma de* which prefaces one of the manuscripts, its presence does not imply an attempted *sūtrification*. The famous text of the first Pan chen bLa ma, the *bLa ma mchod pa*, also bears a Sanskrit title (*Guru pūjā*), but has never been passed off as being of Indian origin, much less the word of the Buddha.

Mr. Imaeda’s work is divided into four parts: (1) an introduction [including an extensive discussion of the manuscripts (pp. 5–12), a synoptic study (p. 13), and a comparison with the *Gaṇḍavyūha* (pp. 19–31)] (2) the translation of the text (pp. 37–74) [extremely accurate and readable] (3) the text’s relationship to other ‘Tun H’uang texts especially to the *Lha yul du lam bstan pa* and the *bsNgo ba* (pp. 75–82)] and conclusion (pp. 83–85) and finally (4) the manuscripts (or portions thereof) (pp. 95–144).

It is clear from the text that 8th-century Tibetans definitely suffered from what Tsong kha pa, half a millenium later, would characterize as a *skye bu chung ba* complex, the over-preoccupation with this life, this death, and the better future life. It is the genius of the author of the *Story* to have recognized this and to have so interestingly dealt with this attitude in a Buddhist setting. It is the genius of Mr. Imaeda to have presented this work to us in such an exhaustive and fascinating study.

Jose I. Cabezon

Theravāda Meditation: The Buddhist Transformation of Yoga, by Winston King, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980.

In his latest book, *Theravāda Meditation: The Buddhist Transformation of Yoga*, Winston King seeks to interpret and unravel the relationship of the two components of the Theravāda path of meditation, *samatha* and *vipassanā*. The Theravāda tradition acknowledged, from a very early period, that tension existed between these two components, and scholars of Buddhism have long sought to understand just how these two methods of meditation, in many ways so different in nature, together constitute the path to *nibbāna*. King’s