THE JOURNAL

OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF

BUDDHIST STUDIES

Volume 9 *1986* *Number 2*

CONTENTS

I. ARTICLES

II. BOOK REVIEWS

II. REVIEWS

The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism. A Phenomenological Study of Kūkai and Dōgen, by David Shaner. Albany: State University of New York, 1985.

Comparative philosophy offers an author one of the most promising and, at the same time, potentially perilous tasks. It provides unique possibilities for insight and cross-cultural understanding, or alternatively, it may result in gross misrepresentation or facile reductive comparisons. David Shaner in *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism* (one of the State University of New York's Buddhist Series) carefully threads his way through the comparative enterprise, while explicitly acknowledging its methodological limitations. In this work the author is concerned not so much with a strictly comparative study as such, as with the hermeneutical possibilities that the phenomenological tradition has to offer for a study of two of the most outstanding Japanese Buddhist thinkers, Kūkai and Dōgen.

The author begins with a fairly lengthy discussion of phenomenology, emphasizing its applicability for comparative philosophy. Phenomenology is particularly appropriate, according to Shaner, because it is a methodology of "description exclusively oriented towards introspection upon the axioms of the experiential process" which is common to all mankind. Phenomenology attempts to examine the structure of experience that gives rise to and exists a priori to the noesis / noema, mind / body split. Shaner then proceeds to outline a phenomenological description of the experience of "bodymind" as it is "primordially given" without any thetic positing whatsoever. Body and mind are seen "to share an organismic process in which they are mutually dependent" because "phenomenologically speaking, one can never experience an independent mind or body."

It is Shaner's contention that this is similar in structure to the paradigmatic state of enlightenment articulated by both Kūkai and Dōgen throughout their work. Kūkai expressed the non-duality of body / mind in the phrase "enlightenment in this very body," and based his teachings for attaining it on practices that focused on sensual phenomena, such as *maṇḍala, mantra,* and *mudrā,* in order to aid the practitioner to gain an awareness of immediate experience free from discursive thought. Dōgen

taught that to attain understanding one must "cast off (the concepts of) body and mind" and centered his teaching on the incessant practice of "just sitting," which he considered the very activity of enlightenment itself, free even from the concept of "attaining enlightenment." In Shaner's interpretation, it is the experience of "bodymind" free from thetic positing based on the noesis / noematic split that characterizes both Kūkai's and Dōgen's description of the enlightened mode of awareness. This strongly parallels the phenomenological analysis.

Thus phenomenology provides a powerful hermeneutical tool for us to gain an appreciation of these Japanese Buddhist thinkers. It also transposes their philosophies directly into the framework of current discussions of the "mind-body problem." This is of particular relevance now, the author suggests, because the "mind-body antimony . . . [is] irresolvable unless the Platonic or Cartesian assumptions about 'what is mind' and 'what is body' are reconsidered."

The main shortcoming of this work lies with phenomenology itself. Shaner takes great pains to qualify Husserl's exaggerated truth-claims for phenomenology and to explicate his own presuppositions, but it often seems that we are then left with little more than an "appropriate" hermeneutical strategy, since the whole of the study lies "within the limits of the phenomenological *epoché*" outside of any attempt at evaluating its ultimate validity. But then, this is a problem that the phenomenologists and their critics have thrashed out in greater detail elsewhere.

By applying phenomenology hermeneutically the author is able to skillfully explicate often tradition-bound concepts and doctrines and extract vital and (contemporaneously) relevant meaning from them. If it is any measure of success, his work prompts one to return to the original texts themselves (á la Husserl's cry "to the things themselves") to reread them in a new, and perhaps brighter, light.

William Waldron

A Catalogue of the sTog Palace Kanjur, by Tadeusz Skorupski. Bibliographia Philologica Buddhica, Series Maior, IV. Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1985. xxvi + 367 pp.

Tadeusz Skorupski teaches in the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His previous publications