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The Tantric Distinction: An Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, by Jeffrey Hopkins, edited by Anne C. Klein. London: Wisdom Publications, 1984. pp. 176. Glossary. Softcover \$8.95.

Over the past several years, Jeffrey Hopkins has given us a small library of excellent scholarly expositions and translations of works of the dGe lugs pa Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika school of Tibetan Buddhism. This latest effort is a popular work based on a series of lectures explaining the tenets of that school. Not being a scholarly work in that it lacks the scholarly apparatus of footnotes and references, it is by Hopkins' allowance, a "personalized account" of a scholar who is also a practitioner.

The first part of the book is a variation of the classical presentations of impermanence, saṃsāra, and nirvāṇa. Hopkins gives us a fresh and novel look at these subjects, though the language throughout the book is at times tortured, needing more extensive editing. The second part gives a neat overview of much of his other work. In many ways it could be looked upon as a *Reader's Digest* version of his other works, for he nicely condenses into these few pages much of what he exposes at length elsewhere. This work could be seen as a primer of dGe-lugs-pa thought and so could be profitably read. We are, however, confronted with a serious dilemma that may face all scholar-practitioners. Hopkins' scholarly works can clearly be seen as being expository—that is, he objectively puts forth the traditional views as they are traditionally held. Can, however, a Western scholar attempting to write from totally within a tradition, as Hopkins does here, balance his personal commitment to the tradition with the more objective dictates of a scholarly approach? There seems to be no simple answer to this question. Though Hopkins' method raises this issue, he shows no cognizance of it in this book.

Reading this book brings the issue strongly to the fore. This becomes painfully evident when Hopkins attempts to set forth the background (chap. 8) for the Consequence, Prāsaṅgika school. Here we might expect to find conflict between the scholarly approach and that of the practitioner; however, it seems a choice has already been made. Hopkins states, "Buddha is said to have taught doctrines on which both the Low Vehicle and the Great Vehicle tenet systems are based" (p. 85). In the context of what follows the "is said" is not the expression of somebody else's opinion; it is an expression of what Hopkins regards as fact. Hopkins goes on to state, "But he [the Buddha] did give teachings on which the four tenet systems rely, and these remained intact

until about forty years after his death. At that time the Great Vehicle teaching went underground or, as some say, to the country of the gods, dragons (nāga), and so forth . . . Nāgārjuna brought the Great Vehicle teaching back to India, using books from the land of the Nāgas" (p. 85).¹ In other words, Hopkins holds the view that the Buddha did in fact teach the Great Vehicle in some form that would be recognizably distinct from the "Hīnayāna." Hopkins offers no elaboration, nor is any alternate history provided, nor does it seem likely that Hopkins is restating Conze's evolutionary statement: "There is in Buddhism really no innovation, but what seems so is in fact a subtle adaptation of pre-existing ideas."² This traditional history is the only history Hopkins gives as the only explanation for the way things are in Buddhism, and it is, by the standards of historical-critical methodology, nothing more than a pious fiction.

If Hopkins' ignoring the hard won results of historical studies is a problem, his strident polemical stance is no less so, particularly since this is a book for a general or non-scholarly audience. We shall let Hopkins speak here. (Please note this is only a very small sampling, and no injustice has been done to context.) Footnoting the first mention of the Low Vehicle, he states that Low Vehicle is an appropriate description of these non-Mahāyāna schools, and he goes on to state that it is possible to fall from the Great Vehicle by being born in Sri Lanka "where Low Vehicle Buddhism is widespread" (p. 90). "This means that according to the Consequence [Prāsaṅgika] School the Low Vehicle schools do not even know how to present a path of liberation because the Low Vehicle tenet systems incorrectly describe the method for becoming a Foe Destroyer [*arhat*]. In this sense the Consequence School is exclusive. In another sense, however, it is inclusive because it teaches that all the great Foe Destroyers of the past [Ānanda, Śāriputra, etc.?] cognized the same most subtle emptiness that the Consequence School describes" (p. 111). "The Buddha described by Low Vehicle tenet systems is not a Buddha at all according to the Consequence School, for he is depicted as cognizing a very coarse type of emptiness. Such a being has not even attained liberation from cyclic existence . . ." (p. 123). Finally, we face these rhetorical questions: "If you love people and wish to help them and understand the compatibility of emptiness and appearance, why would you seek your own liberation from cyclic existence? In other words, why would anyone be a Low Vehicle practitioner" (p. 161)?

In reading this book, it is apparent, though not always clearly so, that we have here two Low Vehicles: The non-Mahāyānist Low Vehicle schools and the Low Vehicle of the Mahāyāna, particularly of the Consequence school. The latter are those who do not or cannot develop *bodhicitta*, but who realize the Consequence school emptiness. Their situation is bad enough, but it is the former group that is in real trouble. These unfortunates, among whom Hopkins counts the modern Therāvādins, are so bootless they "do not even know how to present a path of liberation," and, following a bogus Buddha, they are incapable of any genuine attainment. Hopkins can, in all likelihood, point to one or another exegetical source for most, if not all, of his statements, but why put forward this polemic? It is highly doubtful that his polemic helps the general reader understand Buddhism, which is Hopkins' stated purpose. There are, after all, modern Tibetan expositors of their tradition, such as Geshé Rabten, who rarely resort in their writings to such extended and vociferous polemics as those that are so painfully present in Hopkins' book. There is no pressing need to take a polemical stance, and given the present state of knowledge, there is no reason not to put the Tibetan, or any Buddhist, polemical tradition into a historical perspective. There is, however, no attempt in this book at genuine historical contextualization, and thus there is nothing to prevent this work from being dismissed as a divisive and polemical sectarian tract. This is unfortunate, given the quality of Hopkins' expository works and his undoubted philological learning. There is no reason that the needs of the practitioner cannot be served by scholarship, and there is no need for the scholar-practitioner to do an injustice to the store of historical, philological, or philosophical knowledge that is available.

Bruce Burrill

NOTES

1. This is a reiteration of an exposition already given in Hopkins' *Meditation on Emptiness*; it is based on the traditional doctrinal history, Jam-yang-shay-bā's *Great Exposition of Tenets*. London: Wisdom Publications, 1983. p. 358.

2. Edward Conze, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1967) p. 75.