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Review Of "Buddhism: A History" By N. R. Reat

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from postcolonial Africa to the German "Miracle." But there are some serious oversights made in areas with which I am familiar. In a single chapter grandly labeled "Novgorod, Italy and the Four Dragons," Powelson warns us that the economic successes of Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore are apt to dissipate as quickly as their two European forerunners. He lumps them all together as "paternalistic, authoritarian societies." To say this is to ignore the dramatic evolution of Taiwan and Korea over the past decade into working democracies. Korea in 1994 is at least as good an example of "power-diffusion" as Japan. And as for their "discouraged and powerless labor unions," I suggest that Professor Powelson take a trip to Ulsan sometime when the angry unions at Hyundai Heavy Industries are on strike to discover a new definition of institutional power.

Finally, I must take strong exception to his over-exact comparisons of Northwestern Europe and Japan. Not only does his definition of Northwestern Europe seem too arbitrary, but he has given far too much weight to the bargaining power of the peasantry in Japan, or in early times, the merchants. The haphazardly formed *ikki* were by no means so powerful in the power-distribution of medieval Japan as he suggests. By the Tokugawa period, the very word *ikki* was used only to denote a peasant rebellion. Nor can all the shoguns be arbitrarily lumped into one category; Tokugawa Ieyasu's tightly organized and stratified Shogunate was comparable to its forerunners mostly in name. Japan's Meiji modernization was far more of a top-down exercise than Powelson seems ready to admit. The young samurai-bureaucrats of the Restoration took over the direction of steel mills and shipping lines because the old merchant houses proved unequal to that task. To assert that a modern legal system and "the basis for a liberal economy" was in place by 1868 is vastly to overstate the case (pp. 31, 38).

Nonetheless, Powelson is correct in comparing the "contract feudalism" of Japan with that of medieval Europe (northeastern as well as northwestern). Much the same point has been made by Japanese commentators like Yamamoto Shichihei, although they were happier with the word consensus rather than contract. There was indeed a difference between the considerable extent of "power-diffusion" in Japan, throughout its history, and that of its Asian neighbors. Whether this was the vital factor in Japan's economic development remains debatable. But Professor Powelson has made a very good case for it.

Overall, his argument that a liberal economic system cannot be imposed by interventionist power, makes an important point. While specialists can well advance disagreements with some of the specific conclusions he cites, it is at the same time refreshing to find a scholar who can advance a thesis like this with such authority, imagination and breadth of vision.

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Buddhism: A History. By NOBLE ROSS REAT. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1994. xi, 376 pp. \$60.00 (cloth); \$18.95 (paper).

The monograph under review appears as the first in a series, the *Religions of the World*, edited by Noble Ross Reat, Professor of Religion at University of Queensland, Australia. The series proposes to treat each major world religion in two volumes, one on history and another on beliefs and practices. This book—as will its future

companion volumes—seeks a middle ground between the brevity and generality with which religious traditions are treated in world religions textbooks and detailed, specialized studies which either assume or ignore a broader historical background and sociocultural context.

By his own admission the author's method may be classified as "traditional, Western-style history" in the sense of a "narrative approach" which looks at Buddhism as a "coherent and comprehensible historical phenomenon" (p. vii). His primary purpose is to "tell the story of Buddhism in such a way that Western readers may . . . comprehend and appreciate the beauty, coherence and continuing significance of the religion" (p. 1). This reviewer believes that Reat has successfully accomplished his purpose. *Buddhism: A History* provides the reader with a coherent sense of the Buddhist tradition from its origins and development in India (Chapters 1–5), to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia (Chapter 6–7), through East Asia and Central Asia (Chapters 8–12), and Buddhism in the West (Chapter 13). This sequential, diachronic, historical narrative is supplemented by a selected, relatively brief chapter-by-chapter bibliography, an extensive glossary, a pronunciation guide, and a useful subtopically organized index. Presumably because the book is aimed at introductory level college students, the author chose—with few exceptions—to eliminate footnotes. Given the relatively detailed nature of the historical narrative, in this reviewer's opinion selected reference footnotes would have enhanced the value and utility of the book. It seems somewhat incongruous not to have used footnotes but to have used diacritical marks on foreign language proper nouns as well as technical terms. Such incongruity—if it may be so considered—is inevitable in a monograph which strives for a middle ground between a brief introductory survey, on the one hand, and a more detailed, focused monograph, on the other.

Even as detailed a treatment of Buddhism as this volume is, it must perforce be highly selective. Buddhologists and students of various Buddhist traditions will inevitably take issue with what Reat has chosen to exclude from his narrative. In this reviewer's opinion, to criticize the book for its omissions is unfair to the author's stated purpose. Reat, himself, does not lose sight of his mission and in this sense the book is well balanced and clearly written. It is, as it were, a textbook—albeit an ambitious one.

Perhaps the most interesting question to be asked of a monograph such as this is whether in this postmodern, deconstructed age there is a place for such a "great tradition" story which privileges the mainstream—the elite institutions, the normative texts, the doctrinal systems—and which significantly downplays variety and complexity not to mention the current hermeneutical issues of gender, class, and the social construction of reality. To be sure, it might be argued that the two volumes taken together, the one on history and the other on belief and practice, will provide a wider purview of a religious tradition than, as in this case, only the one volume on Buddhist history. Nevertheless, a scholar of the Upanishads may want to take issue with the decidedly Advaitan reification of the Upanishadic worldview (p. 5); the critical theorist may blanch at the historical reading of the Buddha in the Pāli Suttas that states "there is no reason to doubt . . . that he [the Buddha] was a sensitive, intelligent, and privileged young man" (p. 7); and a student of Thai culture will be perplexed by the idealization of contemporary Thai Buddhism with no reference to the "contradictions" which are not being accommodated as well as those which are (p. 128).

As suggested by the above examples, *Buddhism: A History*, has a normativeness derived from the way in which the author tells his story. To be sure, each of us

brings to our distinctive scholarly tasks the normativeness of our own view, interpretation, theory, or methodology. The normativeness of Reat's monograph does not derive from a grand theory or a particular interpretative slant but is one born of the author's purpose—to tell a unified, cohesive story of Buddhism. We should look at this volume, therefore, as Reat's story of Buddhism intended as a country-by-country, selective, historical survey of the development of Buddhism as a "great tradition," a middle ground between a chapter on Buddhism in an introductory world religions textbook and a detailed, scholarly monograph.

As an admittedly western style history of the Buddhist tradition, *Buddhism: A History* differs from Peter Harvey's broader, less historically comprehensive introduction to Buddhism (*An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990]) which shares Reat's descriptive approach, or from Richard Gombrich's more analytical and historically focused study of Theravāda Buddhism in its Indian and Sri Lankan contexts (*Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benaras to Modern Colombo*) [London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988]. The new volume by John S. Strong (*The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations* [Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995]), especially when coupled with the forthcoming revised companion book by Richard Robinson and Willard Johnson, et al. (*The Buddhist Religion: An Historical Introduction* [Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Company]), provides a less historically linear, less "great tradition" driven, and a more textually based introduction to the study of Buddhism, which readers may find more challenging but also more nuanced as an introduction to the study of Buddhism.

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The Failure of Political Islam. By OLIVIER ROY. Translated from French by CAROL VOLK. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994. xi, 238 pp. \$22.95.

Olivier Roy did fieldwork in Afghanistan in the early 1980s. He carries out research at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and teaches at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, in Paris. His book is about contemporary Islamic fundamentalist movements and Islamist states as an alternative to manage Muslim societies. It includes an introduction, eleven well-balanced chapters, a conclusion and notes (the French edition contains footnotes but is far less elegant than the superb American one). It is followed by a bibliography and an index lacking in the French edition (Paris: Esprit/Seuil, 1992). There are no maps in either edition.

The last two chapters (pp. 168–93) concern Shiism and the revolution in Iran and its foreign policy. The other well-documented case of an Islamist state is Afghanistan (chap. 9, "Jihad and Traditional Society," pp. 147–67). The author gives a philosophical approach from his documents on anti-Soviet peasant guerillas around the dogmatic notion of *jihad*. There, he explains the organization, mobilization, and the cultural relationship to violence in Afghan society. This was briefly developed in Roy's Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; French edition: Paris: Le Seuil, 1985). In contrast with the details concerning the concept of *jihad* in Afghanistan, chapter 5 does not mention the Algerian neofundamentalists GIA, Islamic Armed Group (pp. 75–88).