

be successful, such superimposition should be explicable and communicable, at least to some extent. For that, it requires the vehicle of language. The Zen writers examined by Stambaugh do try to interpret experience in words and concepts. But, confronted with the intractable problem of dualism, they (at least Hisamatsu and Nishitani) are quick to repudiate the very principle of conceptualization, interpreting their difficulties away as paradoxes to be “broken through” without the use of reason. To be effective, analytical tools must be sharpened rather than used self-destructively and then discarded, and the hesitation of much Zen literature on this point opens an opportunity for philosophers like Stambaugh to make a valuable contribution. I feel that *The Formless Self* does not take sufficient advantage of this opportunity. But while arguing for the extended use of philosophical analysis, I am far from expecting it to unveil the deepest mysteries of Zen experience. When properly recognized and precisely defined, a paradox remains a legitimate paradox. As Stambaugh rightly observes (p. 15), when it comes to ultimate questions none of us ordinary mortals knows anything.

***Indestructible Truth: The Living Spirituality of Tibetan Buddhism.* By Reginald A. Ray. Boston and London: Shambhala Publications, 2000. 494pp. Hardcover: \$29.95**

***Secret of the Vajra World: The Tantric World of Tibet.* By Reginald A. Ray. Boston and London: Shambhala Publications, 2001. 524pp. Hardcover: \$29.95**

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Reginald A. Ray and Shambhala Publications' recent two volume introduction to the spirituality of Tibetan Buddhism is, frankly, a literary genre-defining classic. Outlining the synthetic middle ground between popular and academic Tibetan Buddhist literature, *Indestructible Truth* (hereafter, *IT*) and *Secret of the Vajra World* (hereafter, *SVW*) have finally set a circumscribed standard of excellence for that field of Tibetan Buddhist studies in which practice and scholarship overlap. These two volumes are valuable to both introductory and expert audiences, as they present to date the first comprehensive, explicitly “non-technical” set of textbooks on Tibetan Buddhism published in North America. This systematic overview is engagingly articulated by a scholar whose own accomplishments and range of expertise these texts aptly demonstrate. Author of the 1994 Oxford University Press *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and*

Orientations, and a frequent participant in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, Ray, who is both a University of Chicago doctorate in Buddhist studies and an *ācarya* in the lineage of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, holds positions at Naropa University and University of Colorado.

Ray's current compendium, the cumulative fruit of extensive years spent teaching in this field, skillfully achieves its own prescribed goals, including "striking some balance between a Western scholar writing about Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetans speaking about their own tradition in their own voices" (*IT*, p 3), a task relevant to the ethics of strictly academic literature today in addition to this heretofore unparadigmed "non-technical" but scholarly genre. With a general emphasis on illuminating the spiritual landscape of traditional Tibet and its encounter with "the modern West," these texts negotiate well a delicate balance between the emic and the etic, the Buddhist and the critical-scholarly. Throughout his work, Ray navigates methodologically between historical description, philosophical analysis, and invocation of intimate personal anecdotes from contemporary Tibetan Buddhist teachers, such as Chögyam Trungpa and Tulku Thondup, as well as from traditional hagiographies of Tibetan *siddhas* such as *Mi la ras pa* and *sGam po pa*. These two companion volumes are frequently cross-referenced, providing helpful tables and timelines throughout, and supplying a near-exhaustive account of all the major sacred sites, personages, practices, lineages, texts, doctrines, and historical events relevant to a broad overview of Tibetan Buddhism.

The organization of this comprehensive account is interesting. The first volume, bearing taxonomical primacy and entry into the system, explicitly addresses "exoteric" aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, such as monasticism and the bodhisattva vow, while the second volume, weighed by taxonomical ultimacy and systematic completion, deals with its more "esoteric" tantric dimensions. Such a taxonomy reflects the inner logic of many Tibetan doxographical and textual taxonomies, particularly those of the "Practice Lineages," such as rNying ma's yogic system of Nine Yānas, and other genres of traditional exposé that are ordered by a hierarchy ranging from Hīnayāna to Mahāyāna to Vajrayāna. Furthermore, although going unthematized by Ray, this pattern follows related styles of Tibetan commentary (*'grel*, Skt. *bhāṣya*) which circumscribe meaning (*don*, Skt. *ārtha*) progressively from "outer" (*phyi 'grel*) to "inner" (*nang 'grel*) to "secret" (*gsang 'grel*).

Indestructible Truth thus sets out in Part One, "The Sacred Environment," to delineate traditional Tibetan views on "the cosmos and its inhabitants" before covering the history of Indian Buddhism's early (seventh to ninth century) spreading to Tibet, corresponding to the "Old Translation" (*snga 'gyur*) transmission of the rNying ma pas, and the later (tenth–thirteenth century) spreading of the "New Translation" (*sar 'gyur*) bKa' rgyud pas, bKa' gdams pas, and Sa skya pas. In chronological format,

the “modern traditions” of dGe lugs pa and Ris med are then discussed prior to an elucidation of Tibetan Buddhism’s “core teachings” and “philosophies” in terms of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. Having presented this daunting amount of material in a thoroughly delightful and soulful way, and following a centripetal logic indigenous to tantric systems, the second volume picks up with a progressive unveiling of the Vajrayāna, known by Tibetans themselves as the path of the Secret Mantra (*gsang sngags*).

In his Introduction to *Secret of the Vajra World*, Ray inquires into the dynamic, mysterious “enduring quality of Tibet”:

What is the secret of the world that was traditional Tibet? In this book, I propose that the secret of this vajra world lies in something that transcends Tibet itself, namely its spiritual traditions, and particularly the Tantric or Vajrayana Buddhism that provided the foundation of Tibetan culture for some twelve hundred years. . . . I suggest to the reader that the color, energy, and vivacity of Tibet are owing, in some significant way, to its tantric foundations (*SVW*, p. 2).

The text proceeds to review the more exoteric “spreadings” and “view” of Vajrayāna in Tibet before addressing its internal logic in Part Two, “Entering the Vajra World.” In these chapters, Ray introduces a range of key tantric elements, including recognition of one’s guru as the embodiment of realization, initiation rituals, and preliminary practices (*mngon ’gro*) such as prostrations and *yi dam* visualizations, as well as the alchemy and physiology of the inner yogas. In accord with a progressive esocentrism, Part Three introduces the innermost, secret teachings and practices of Mahāmudrā (*phyag rgya chen po*) and rDzogs chen, which are identified as the essence-and-fruit of New Translation and Old Translation traditions respectively. The reader is subsequently brought back to the context of the modern West, in which matters concerning the trepidations and conversions of American Buddhists are addressed alongside many breathtaking, palpable accounts of the lives and deaths of contemporary Tibetan Buddhist leaders, such as His Holiness the sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa (*SVW*, pp. 465–80).

As with any systematic overview, it is significant to note that while certain aspects of a given subject matter are structurally normalized through any process of exposition, others tend to be categorially marginalized. In gauging the overall logic and pattern of this system, therefore, what is left out of these texts becomes relevant. In this respect, the discussion of Yogācāra provided in chapter sixteen of volume one focuses on the doctrine of Three Natures (*rang bzhin gsum*, Skt. *trilakṣaṇa*) but does not discuss the matter of Mind Only (*sems tsam*, Skt. *cittamātra*). A basic description of the Bon tradition is also absent. As Ray puts it, the Bon pos

are “not explicitly Buddhist.” (*IT*, p. 184) With respect to Bon and indigenous shamanic practices, therefore, he writes, “They are certainly important to the overall picture of Tibetan religious and cultural life, but devoting chapters to them would have led me too far afield from the central topic” (*IT*, p. 5). Depending on where the line is drawn between Buddhism and Bon, or Bon and “shamanism” (another distinction that might be better clarified), structurally speaking, one might say that Bon is not so far on the periphery of the matters addressed in these texts, and readers will find in the work of Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, Per Kvaerne, and Katsumi Mimaki a good range of supplementary materials regarding the Bon religion.

Furthermore, with respect to categorial privileges, it may be noted that a more politically exacting taxonomical treatment of the term “Hīnayāna” than the one provided (*SVW*, pp. 66–68fn.) might also be in order for all future texts of this genre that will take this compendium as their standard. Overall however, these two volumes pay a great deal of deliberate attention to the subtle dissonances and contextual issues facing Tibetan Buddhism’s integration with “the modern West.” They conscientiously address, among other topics, the influence of “scientific materialism” on western culture (*IT*, p. 57), popular concerns regarding the psychology of Tulku (*sprul sku*) childhood development (*SVW*, ch.16), and contemporary challenges facing retreat practices (*SVW*, ch.17). At times, though, it does appear that controversial issues are avoided, such as the question of purported sexual abuse of power by tantric gurus in America (*SVW*, p. 170), or the complex matter of sexuality, secret sex, and tantric practice generally speaking.

Certain issues symptomatic of non-technical work may pose minimal difficulties for academic audiences. For language students in particular, the somewhat inconsistent blend of phoneticization and transliteration for parenthetical Tibetan and Sanskrit terms in these texts is rather frustrating. Just as this conventional lack of diacritical precision marks a limitation defining this introduction’s own domain of practical scholarship, so too do a certain extent of generalized discourse, as found in such statements as: “According to tradition. . .” (*IT*, p. 186), “Tibetan tradition holds that. . .” (*SVW*, p. 69), or “In Tibet, it is said that. . .” (*SVW*, p. 91). The reader must admit, however, that Ray’s own academic and experiential expertise affords him much leeway in this respect, especially in view of this compendium’s central focus on spirituality. Also suitable for spiritual scholarship is Ray’s frequent reliance on secondary resources and oral commentary, drawing the reader in closer to the voices of modern Tibetans speaking on their own traditions. Such referential ground may indeed be more appropriate to the applied genre outlined by these texts than detailed textual analysis would be.

Perhaps more consequential to a review of this compendium than any such technical matters is the implicit structure of a comprehensive exposi-

tory system that pivots on the term “spirituality,” a prime denominator which bears at least some critique of “western materialism” at its base. (See, for example, *IT*, pp. 365–66, and *SVW*, p. 482) In this respect, while Ray successfully articulates and achieves his goal of supplementing a deficiency of available literature emphasizing the “Practice Lineages” of bKa’ gyud and rNying ma (*IT*, p. 3), the systematic logic of these volumes as a whole, their own conceptual and contextual framework, could use even more elucidation in order to prevent structural criticisms. For example, although the esocentrism ordering the subject matter might appear to reflect a “western” fascination with “eastern” mystical secrets, or even a Tibetan assimilation of American expectations, a simple orientalist line of critique toward this compendium would be inappropriate, as most Tibetan Buddhists do present their own traditions with Vajrayāna at the central axis. The critical reader would benefit therefore, from further emplacement of this compendium’s own taxonomical logic within the framework of Tibetan expository traditions, a platform which might perhaps be used to oppose such a structural critique as incidental to an emic esocentrism and centripetal yogic logic common to some or all of Tibet’s Vajrayāna lineages.

Readers may also be inclined to consider the precise domain and function of the taxonomer “spirituality” in these texts and their context. If this cathected “western” category is to be understood in terms of lived experience of the “ultimate nature of reality” (*SVW*, p. 2), it might follow that the indestructible, *vajra* truth of this presentation is itself esocentric because it must be dis-covered through a kind of perennial, culturally transcendent experience of tantric praxis that corresponds with a secret, romantic, absolute content. In addition to the hermeneutic difficulties posed by non-technical use of the terms “spirituality” or “reality,” the category of “experience” with respect to discourse on Asian religions (see *IT*, pp. 28–34, “The ‘Proof’ of Experience”) also introduces potential structural infractions, as Robert Sharf has pointed out in the case of Zen studies. If such logic goes unclarified, and “spirituality” is taken to be somehow categorially distinct from “history” and “philosophy” in these texts (see *IT*, p. 4), there is some space to assume “spirituality,” or even tantra itself, to be more within the domain of the so-called Practice Lineages who emphasize meditative experience than the other more “scholarly” lineages. This is certainly not the argument that Ray is making however. As Ray points out, ever since Buddhism’s formal inception in Tibet, “the conventional Mahāyāna (Shantarakshita) and the unconventional Vajrayāna (Padmasambhava) orientations worked in alliance with each other, supporting, supplementing, and complementing one another.” (*IT*, p. 98) The historical symbiosis and tension between the principles of the monk and the yogin among Tibetan lineages is in fact explicitly thematized throughout these texts, although according to their overall presentation, an esocentric “tantric core” embodied by tantric praxis, not philosophy or scholarship,

is structurally allotted center stage, as tantra's centripetal secrecy is likewise revealed to be a potent cultural preservative.

In light of this compendium's tremendous array of detailed information, and compounded by its aesthetic readability and evocative, heartfelt sensitivity, Reginald Ray sets a circumscribed standard for that emergent field of "non-technical" Tibetan Buddhist studies which finds its domain both inside and outside the academy. A virtual prototype for future texts of this genre, Shambhala's current series *Indestructible Truth* and *Secret of the Vajra World* will certainly benefit practitioners and academicians alike, as it illuminates the grounds cohering these two interest groups. Useful as comprehensive textbooks for an introductory course, or even for practical guidance in Tibetan Buddhist meditative exercises such as gTong len (*IT*, pp. 351–54), Ray's two volume series skillfully demonstrates the inner wealth and everyday relevance of Tibetan Buddhist spirituality in contemporary diasporic contexts, establishing, indeed, that Tibetan Buddhism is no "anachronism" (*IT*, p. 449).