

## BOOK REVIEWS

investigate the concrete social and cultural implications of Buddha nature.

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***THE ORIGINS OF INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY.*** By N. Ross Reat. Asian Humanities Press, Berkeley, 1990. 356 pp. with bibliographical references, index. ISBN 0-89581-923-6 (cloth), 0-89581-924-4 (pbk).

Having met and become friends with the author several years ago on the old precincts of the *Eastern Buddhist*, I confess to being favorably disposed towards this book from the start. (Reat may be better known to others as the author of a semi-infamous article on "Insiders and Outsiders in the Study of Religious Traditions.") As it turns out, that predisposition was one of the few things that enabled me to make it through some of the less enthralling portions of this work.

Reat's approach is historical, which is as unremarkable to a Western audience as it is unexamined as a methodology. Still the continuity that he is able to discern beginning with Vedic materials and extending through the early Buddhist *suttas* gives him a coherent theme, and his analysis of the material is comprehensive and deeply rewarding. He spends almost the first half of the book on Vedic material exclusively, which to judge from the relative scarcity of relevant citations, indicates the thoroughness of his treatment. The next two sections examine the *Upaniṣads*, and the precise extent and manner in which they differ from their Vedic roots. The final section, entitled "The Fundamentals of Buddhist Psychology," is the most interesting, and could most likely stand on its own, though certain lines of the argument would be truncated. To give only one example, his discussion of the evolution and significance of the term *nama-rūpa* is a wonderfully clear illustration of how de-contextualization leads to interpretive distortion. The topic I found most intriguing was the similarity between early Buddhist ideas and what later developed as the Yogacara school of Mahayana philosophy. The evidence is strong, though one sometimes feels that Reat is constructing his argument on foundations that are not as solid as he takes them to be. The striking parallelism he uncovers suggests a re-evaluation of the development of Buddhist philosophy, and Indian philosophy in general, relegating both Abhidharma scholasticism and its countervailing Madhyamaka dialectic to the fringes, as aberrations in the great mainstream of Buddhist philosophy culminating in Yogacara, arguably the most successful form of Buddhist philosophy ever to emerge from India. His elucidation of similarities between *Upaniṣadic* teachings and the early

## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

Buddhist tradition may surprise some, but those who regard Shakyamuni as, if not the perfect teacher, at least a competent teacher will be gratified by his presentation of evidence that the basic core of Buddhist doctrine remained unchanged for more than a millennium.

As for quibbles, many are possible. To start with, citations from the Rig Veda are given in the necessarily archaic (and thus unnecessarily obscure) translations of Griffith and/or Muir, when surely Reat is capable of retranslating these passages himself (which he does only occasionally) to make his points more clearly. Alternatively, he could have cited the more up-to-date translations of some, if not all, of the verses made by Wendy Doniger (sometimes) O'Flaherty, conveniently available as a Penguin paperback, published nine years before Reat's own book. More detrimental to a work of scholarship, and more distracting, is the issue of misprints. This text unfortunately exhibits many of the signs of sloppily processed words—quotes and parentheses which open but do not close, repeated lines, syntactical lapses, and simple misspellings. It is to be hoped that in the future the people at AHP and their authors will be more diligent about proofreading, since such easily avoidable carelessness inevitably detracts from what is otherwise the product of such painstaking research.

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