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Max Nihom: Studies in Indian and Indo-Indonesian Tantrism. The Kuñjarakarṇadharmakathana and the Yogatantra. Vienna 1994, 222p. ([order online](#))

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STUDIES IN INDIAN AND INDO-INDONESIAN TANTRISM.
The Kuñjarakarnadharmakathana and the Yogatantra: by MAX
NIHOM. Vienna, 1994. Pages 222.

The present volume consists of three inter-related studies on Tantric Buddhism and Tantrism in general. Max Nihom says that Indian Buddhist Tantrism has suffered from an over emphasis on the importance of Tibetan sources. He selects an old Javanese printed text *Kuñjara Karnadharmakathana* for serious examination; it is a pre-Islamic text. The second chapter is on Indian Maṇḍalas and literary history in the Indonesian Archipelago. The conclusion drawn is that the fundamental text of *Yogatantras*, the *Tatvasangraha*, was not available in the Archipelago. The third chapter: 'A Vaiṣṇava Heaven, a Śaiva Hell and Buddhist Bliss: an Indological essay on Indo-Javanese Tantrism is mainly based on the text. It is argued that Tantric Studies, based on Buddhist Hindu sources, should be studied as part of Indian culture. This is a thoroughly academic research work of great excellence. The Bibliography is exhaustive.

K. KUNJUNNI RAJA

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Review

Reviewed Work(s):

Studies in Indian and Indo-Indonesian Tantrism: The Kuñjara-karṇa-dharmakathana and the Yogatantra

by Max Nihom

Review by: G. E. Marrison

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MAX NIHOM: *Studies in Indian and Indo-Indonesian tantrism: the Kuñjarakarna-dharmakathana and the Yogatantra*. (Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, vol. 21.) 222 pp. Vienna: Institut für Indologie der Universität Wien, 1994.

This work consists of three studies of aspects of Buddhist Tantrism as reflected in the fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Old Javanese poetic version of the story of Kuñjarakarna. The origin, character and development of Buddhism in pre-Muslim Java is of great interest, but many of the major questions about it remain unanswered. Nihom has made a contribution with the thesis that parts of this poem are based on Buddhist Sanskrit tantric texts, including some well-known mandalas; and he takes issue with Teeuw and Robson who, in translating and commenting on the text in 1981, had stressed the indigenous character of the poem as developing a Javanese syncretic world-view. (See review in *BSOAS*, 46/3, 1983, 586–8.)

Nihom's first study is of Buddhist tantric ritual as represented in the Kuñjarakarna poem. He analyses the role of the tantric practitioner, the doctrine of the six enemies, or moral failings, and the four gifts of material goods, fearlessness, the Buddhist teaching and friendliness, suggesting the Indian antecedents of these features. The second piece is concerned with the apparent absence of influence from one of the most important Tantras, the *Tattvasamgraha*, but the presence in the poem of traces of four Indian Buddhist mandalas. The third study deals with heaven, hell and salvation in the Javanese poem, and their probable Indian sources. In all these, where necessary, Nihom also cites Tibetan evidence, noting however that this is secondary, and often much later than the original Sanskrit texts.

The author sets out his approach: 'Whatever the intrinsic value of knowing what practising Buddhists did and thought on a more or less mundane level, this lacks the overarching interest and universal importance of the nature of being, becoming and destiny, which are the province of elitist religion' (p. 9); and again: 'The canon or high culture then requires what is thought, with the notion in the background that what is thought, after all, determines experience' (p. 10). This is a subjective stance, and when the author seeks to controvert the views of Teeuw and Robson, he seems to me to be advancing one set of speculations in place of another in the intangible field of mythology.

Nihom has brought great commitment and learning into his essays: but in the exposition of so difficult a subject, has not always provided simple explanations. He gives an extensive bibliography, and indexes of proper names, authors and texts; it would have been desirable also to have had a glossarial index of the Buddhist terms cited, and a concordance of textual references.

Comparison with other versions of the

Kuñjarakarna would probably add weight to Nihom's thesis. The *yakṣa* Kuñjarakarna was saved from hell and brought back to life through the compassion of the Buddha Vairocana and his teaching on the Good Law (*sudharma*); his royal friend, Pūrṇaviṣaya was also saved, and cured of his leprosy, by Vairocana. This story is typical of Old Javanese Buddhist literature, in which didactic tales of Avadāna type are the principal texts to preserve Buddhist teaching in Java. The apparently earlier prose version is a lively rendering in comparatively simple language; next in time comes the series of relief panels on the sides of the temple, Candi Jago, near Malang; and last is the poetic version, the subject of the present volume. The sculptures follow the prose text fairly closely: but the poem, which also includes most of the substance of the prose version, has much additional material and a considerably different presentation, especially in the introduction of sections of Buddhist teaching, which are absent from, or only hinted at in the prose. This is particularly the case with cantos 18–20, where Kuñjarakarna is in conversation with Vairocana, and again with cantos 36–39, where Pūrṇaviṣaya is similarly engaged. Moreover, cantos 22–23 deal with the equivalence of Buddhism with Hinduism, a theme treated only summarily in the prose. This last needs more comment from Nihom if he is to maintain his view of the origins of syncretistic Buddhism in Java as against the conclusions of Teeuw and Robson.

Nihom's most important contributions to the study of Buddhism in Java are, firstly, to have widened and deepened the discussion, looking for possible Indian sources for the ideas expressed in the Javanese texts; and, secondly, in seeking to identify and cite Sanskrit texts and Tibetan translations, where parallels are sufficiently close to suggest actual dependence.

G. E. MARRISON

ROBERT CRIBB (ed.): *The late colonial state in Indonesia: political and economic foundations of the Netherlands Indies 1880–1942*. (Verhandelingen van het Koninklijke Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkerkunde, 163.) xiii, 295 pp. Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994. Guilders 40, \$29.50.

Robert Cribb emphasizes the need to look at continuities between the late colonial state and its Indonesian successor, but this laudable aim is only partly realized in this edited collection. Cribb's comparisons with British India underline the Dutch failure to recognize the logic of the growing autonomy of their huge colony, and the fatal Dutch mistake of trying to backpedal under the impact of the 1930s depression. Cornelis Fasseur illustrates a crucial aspect of this process in a ground-breaking study of the Kafkaesque confusion in population classification. Hokkien Chinese from Taiwan were

nombreuses, utiles, soulignant les anomalies grammaticales du texte ou ses difficultés car, malgré sa simplicité générale, certains passages sont parfois peu compréhensibles du fait des allusions qu'ils contiennent à des rites ou à des spéculations ésotériques plus ou moins obscures (v., par exemple, la note 76, pp. 271–272).

Les quatre appendices qui suivent sont intéressants car ils comparent les données des quatre textes utilisés: KMT, *Ṣatsāhasrasamhitā*, *Śrīmatottara* et *Goraḥsasamhitā*: table of verses (Appendice 1), comparaison des contenus des chapitres (Appendice 2), listes des divinités, notamment des *Yoginī* (Appendices 3 à 6). L'ouvrage se termine par une bonne bibliographie et un très utile index.

Ce travail, qui joint la précision philologique à la connaissance des notions et des pratiques du *Kubjikāmata*, est d'une excellente qualité, conforme en cela à la tradition de la recherche indianiste néerlandaise. C'est une contribution de valeur à l'étude du domaine tantrique.

Paris, C.N.R.S.

ANDRÉ PADOUX

Max Nihom, *Studies in Indian & Indo-Indonesian Tantrism: The Kuñjarakarnadharmakathana and the Yogatantra* – Publication of the De Nobili Research Library, Institute of Indology, University of Vienna, 1994, p. 222, bibliog., indexes. (ISBN 3-900-271-26-7)

For those who seek to probe the religious belief system back-grounding a work of classical Indonesian literature such as the *Kuñjarakarnadharmakathana* and to decode the rich store of symbolism contained therein, Nihom's publication will be a beacon. As well as an expertise in Old Javanese, he has brought to his study of this particular *kakawin* poem an obvious in-depth knowledge of both Indian (Sanskrit) and Tibetan languages and has sought to analyse important sections of the *Kuñjarakarna* tale by direct comparison with certain major texts of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism – these, in the main, having Indian and/or Tibetan origin.

Explaining the logic behind this approach, Nihom makes no apology for flying in the face of current attitudes – prevalent in some quarters – which has tended to encourage a region-only approach to the study of classical Indonesian literature. Such attitudes stem from the premise that any apparent connections this literature might have with Indian antecedents are mere reflections of earlier influences that with time were overtaken by the emergence of an underlying continuum of local genius, the end result being “sovereign products” [p. 13]. One can

also observe threads of the same theory winding through the study of classical Indonesian art and architecture and while not wanting here to debate the question with all its facets, I can only agree with Nihom that such an inward approach to research and study has actually reduced the potential for fuller appreciation. This is particularly the case with “products” of ancient Javanese Buddhism where there is little left of an indigenous literary nature to guide a better understanding.

Certainly, as Nihom points out several times in this work, the fact that foreign textual material has been brought to bear in his analysis does not imply conclusion that any such texts are being positively identified as THE inspirational sources used by the Old Javanese poet. For the moment they serve as analytical tools though it will be the lesser or greater degree to which a specific text (or genre of texts) proves to be useful that could lead to further observations and study concerning the time and manner of dissemination of particular religious ideas in the archipelago.

Lacking Nihom’s expertise in Sanskrit and Tibetan, it would not be possible for me to do more than generalise on aspects of his comparisons, but having some experience with translated editions of the comparative texts cited and some familiarity both with iconographic particulars and *maṇḍala* symbolism, his arguments were for the most part easy to follow. Being on more familiar ground with Old Javanese, I found his hypothesis on the *Kuñjarakarna* in the first chapter – particularly in regard to the presence of *maṇḍala* symbolism in the *kakawin* – quite plausible and exciting. In Buddha Vairocana’s sermon to the celestial king Purṇawijaya (Canto 38: 1a–4d), Nihom successfully demonstrates affiliation between certain gifts (*dāna*) and their sequence as mentioned by Vairocana with *maṇḍala* paradigms manifest in the *Vajrahṛdayālaṅkāra-tantra* and *Vajrasekhara-tantra*. While I had one or two questions, one for example concerning the “*dānamudrā*” mentioned as the “diagnostic gesture” of Amitābha [p. 49] and of which I am unaware (perhaps read *dhyānamudrā*?), they may relate to my own ignorance and certainly did not reflect on the overall argument.

Chapter Two challenges the long-held notion that the *vajradhātu-maṇḍala* of the *Tattvasaṃgraha* (TS) is the only *yoga-tantric* feature in Indonesia and further posits that the codification of the TS (as a collection of *maṇḍalas* of which the *vajradhātu-maṇḍala* is the *mahā-maṇḍala*) might actually have occurred on the Sub-continent at a time later than the arrival in Indonesia of some of its ‘sub’-*maṇḍalas* (e.g. the *Trilokavijaya-maṇḍala*) which may have entered and continued to survive there as separate entities. In any event, from evidence provided by comparative

studies involving certain Balinese Buddhist texts, Nihom suggests that aspects of the *Trilokavijaya-maṇḍala* exhibited in the Balinese material show closer identity with the *Vajraśekhara-tantra* than the TS. This leads him to the opinion that since these ‘sub’-*maṇḍalas* have always included Hindu as well as Buddhist deities (whereas deities of the *vajradhātu-maṇḍala* were originally solely Buddhist), understanding the syncretic nature of these *maṇḍalas* could be of “great importance for the further study of text, art and architecture in the archipelago” [p. 114].

Returning to the *Kuñjarakarna* text in Chapter Three, he takes up the segment (Cantos 27 and 28) giving a description of king Purnawijaya’s sojourn in Hell which he posits shows Vaisnava, Saiva and Buddhist influences. Of particular interest are the comparisons to be made with the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra*. It is in the last sections of Chapter Three that the evidence presented seems more ‘circumstantial’ and ephemeral in nature and, to a certain extent, Nihom himself forecasts that difficulty might be experienced in accepting its validity on all counts.

On a more general note, I should mention that there were times when I had some problems with Nihom’s Old Javanese translations. Oddly, such occasions were rarely with the *Kuñjarakarna* itself but more frequently with passages from the *Sutasoma* being cited in support of a particular line of enquiry relative to the *Kuñjarakarna* [e.g. note 614, pp. 180–1]. Still being heavily involved myself with the *Sutasoma*, I was at pains to follow up these references. In another example, note 89 [p. 37] cites four places in the *Sutasoma* where the word *paṇḍita* reportedly occurs in “yogic contexts”. Of these, only two involved the word *paṇḍita* in any real “yogic context”, while in a fourth, “*paṇḍita*” did not appear at all. However, in several other places where a passage from the *Sutasoma* was actually quoted, I did note small differences between the text obviously being followed by Nihom and the one with which I am currently working. A variance, no matter how small, can have profound repercussions on how one understands a line, a verse or even more and, in the case of the *Sutasoma*, may account for some of the problems experienced where the actual text was not quoted. Those who are more familiar with the text of the *Kuñjarakarna* will no doubt peruse the renderings offered in regard to that work in more detail.

The level of spirituality encompassed by the *Kuñjarakarna kakawin* is that of a highly esoteric form of Buddhist tantrism. The lack of information concerning the sect or group to which the poet belonged makes in-depth understanding extremely difficult while the timespan of centuries separating us from the poet exacerbates linguistic problems.

To overcome some of these obstacles it is necessary to look beyond the shores of ancient Java to other societies embracing similar belief systems. While a selection of experiences resulting from the impact of inflowing religious philosophy on one cultural environment might not necessarily be the model for precisely analysing such experiences in another, some facets will inevitably be found to mirror back and forth. Using Indian sources as such a mirror and perhaps more particularly Tibetan material, a greater array of which has survived in a drier climate, it may yet be possible to gain clearer insight of certain isolated examples of Buddhist tantrism exhibited in art, architecture and literature elsewhere in Asia and Southeast Asia where climatic conditions have been less conducive to the permanence of a wider range of media.

Having worked with *maṇḍala* symbolism in the *Sutasoma* where I also found it expedient to draw on Indo-Tibetan material in analysis, I can applaud Nihom's study as a positive step in the right direction.

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