Harvard Divinity School praise her book fulsomely. This is what happens when scholars theorise on Vajrayana without practising it themselves. Recently it has been revealed in American and British courts that all these Ivy League Universities and some of the Russell groups of Universities indulge in quid pro quo practices. The online and offline praise that Jacoby has been able to get for herself shows why we should not hanker for Ivy League recognitions. All Jacoby’s acolytes are members of the ivory-tower academia, where they probably practice armchair Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. It is generally not the norm to write in the first person in academic reviews. But this reviewer is so nauseated by Jacoby’s book that he has to end this review in the first person: ‘I warn you of the real, palpable evil that is this book. It reeks of moral corruption and superficial jingoism.’ Sera Khandro was certainly a mystic, but Jacoby’s portrayal of Khandro is way off the mark. Jacoby is aware that Atisha Dipamkara was against the kind of debased tantra that Sera Khandro dabbled in and yet Jacoby tautologically praises everything that Khandro did. This uncritical homage to Sera Khandro flies in the face of everything holy. It is the likes of Jacoby, who have destroyed the sacred discipline of tantra. This book should be considered a New Age tantra fad book and the discerning scholar and practitioner should turn to Georg Feuerstein’s tantric corpus to understand even Vajrayana. Prabuddha Bharata brought out a special issue titled ‘Reflections on Tantra’ under the editorship of Swami Narasimhananda in January 2016. This annual issue should be consulted for all things tantric.

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Divination is not a very acceptable topic of discussion within any religion. And rarely do we come across a serious study of divination that is vital to both Buddhism and Hinduism. Beverley Foulks McGuire, to use Walter Pater’s phrase in a very different context, in her hard gemlike monograph brings to life the archaeology of divination as is still practised in Hindu temples and of course, within Buddhism. She even gives a photograph of the wheel tops used in China.

In India, this reviewer has seen shells being used for the same purpose. Foulks McGuire uses the interpretation of the Chinese Buddhist Divination Sutra by the sixteenth-century commentator of the Vinayas, the Venerable Ouyi Zhixu. The monograph under review shows how Zhixu struggled to live an authentic life as a Buddhist monk who was troubled that he may not be good enough for being a Zen monastic. All his life, this Buddhist monk had questioned himself and his scholarship as falling short of the Buddhist monastic ideal. Even in his uses of divination, Zhixu only wanted nirvana.

McGuire has been able to weave Zhixu’s life and his works in this tour de force in Chinese Buddhist scholarship. Zhixu indeed was interested in karma as the name of the monograph suggests, but it is unique because the monograph’s author is able to overcome the structuralist stranglehold, which makes the scholarship of other experts in the field seem dry and devoid of all soul.

This is not a book that one usually reads in one sitting. But this reviewer read it in one sitting because of the book’s wide-ranging scholarship and its beguiling lucidity. Yet the author has burnt a lot of midnight oil and therefore, we find the fourth endnote to Chapter Four in page 174 talking of the 1962 Harvard lectures of J L Austin on the differences between the locutionary and the illocutionary acts. This footnote then correctly moves on to David Gorman’s problematisation of performativity within contemporary literary theory. These references are seamlessly connected to page 83 of this book, subtitled ‘The Genre of Votive Texts: Imagining Future BodhiSattvahood’ within the chapter ‘Vowing to Assume the Karma of Others’.

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Notice

Swami Vrajamohananda, whose pre-monastic name is Prashanta, has recently left the Ramakrishna Order attached to Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math. He is not eligible, therefore, to raise funds or seek other help from our devotees and general public on behalf of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

General Secretary,
Ramakrishna Math and
Ramakrishna Mission

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In this subsection, the very next, or fifth endnote refers us to the Hebrew Bible. McGuire shows her characteristic easy acquaintance with the Bible in this footnote. This Buddhist work per se thus becomes a powerful statement for interreligious dialogue and process philosophies. McGuire teaches East Asian religions in the US, but she could easily teach Biblical studies and literary theory to seminarians and English literature students respectively, going by her scholarship in this book.

The two appendices at the end are essential but the second appendix, ‘A Map of Ouyi’s Life’ is an original effort at cartographical reconstruction, which while occupying just one page must have taken her a lot of effort. Beverley Foulks McGuire is the scholar to turn to in the Western world for rigour, clarity, and originality in many fields. She surpasses the works of Koichi Shinohara in her holistic approach to the analyses of medieval Zen Buddhism.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay