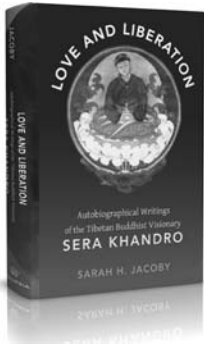


REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



**Love and Liberation:
Autobiographical Writings
of the Tibetan Buddhist
Visionary Sera Khandro**

Sarah H Jacoby

Columbia University Press, 61 West
62 Street, New York, NY 10023.
USA. Website: <https://cup.columbia.edu>. 2016. 456 pp. \$80.00. HB. ISBN
9780231147682.

Sarah H Jacoby has not been able to maintain a critical distance between herself and the auto-hagiography of the Tibetan mystic Sera Khandro Wangmo (1892–1940). Sera Khandro was vigilant about her possible transgressive practices as a *jo min nag min*—neither nun nor laywoman (188), while Jacoby as a wide-eyed acolyte of everything Tibetan does not realise that she weakens the case for Tibetan Buddhism by accepting wholesale Khandro's human failings as being part of Vajrayana.

Jacoby's book is marred by her foregrounding of Vajrayana with the libidinal economy of the *yab yum* dyad within Buddhist tantra. Had Jacoby been existentially authentic, she would have stressed that the *yab yum*—masculine-feminine or father-mother—relationship is a mental construct in praxis. Unfortunately, Jacoby is aware that most Buddhist tantrics imagine union—*bskyed rim*—with their consorts and do not participate within any economy mediated by the libidinal. Even the Shakta epochal avatara, Sri Ramakrishna, who attained all the tantric siddhis and one of his first celibate disciples, Swami Saradananda, never gave into anything libidinal, nor did they drink anything intoxicating. Both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Saradananda were adepts in tantra. Moreover, this reviewer is aware of a contemporary living tantric, who has attained all the tantric siddhis mentioned within both Vajrayana and Shakta tantras. This tantric is horrified by Jacoby's misrepresentation of

tantra and its praxis. While Khandro was acutely aware of her liminal status as a tantric consort and her absolute moral wrongs; Jacoby is preoccupied with possibly psychotic visions of *dakinis* that Khandro had, while Khandro herself knew of her mission as a proclaimer of Buddha-dharma: 'I pray that my final action will be / to practice the Dharma./ I am like a fall and winter flower; / Although I am here today, / I am gone tomorrow' (275).

Sarah H Jacoby is not greater than Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Saradananda. Neither is she more knowledgeable about tantra than the contemporary tantric this reviewer has mentioned above. When all three reject sensuality, how is it possible to take Jacoby seriously? Yet many scholars in the first world have praised her debauched scholarship.

Jacoby's 'Epilogue' is a pseudo-scientific structuralist hotchpotch, which without scrutinising the philosophy of reincarnation comes up with this vacuous statement: 'multiple Tibetan women and men ... would be recognised as her incarnation' (324). Jacoby naively shows how several women in Tibet now are simultaneously Khandro's reincarnations, and all of them are in live-in relationships, which they pass off as *yab yum* relationships. Jacoby is mistaken in her studies of Vajrayana and would do well to read Beverley Foulks McGuire for understanding the differences between true Buddhist tantra and debased practices, which most people erroneously conflate with tantra. This reviewer is disgusted by Jacoby's involvement and co-option in New Age tantra, which has nothing to do with any of the myriad tantras in their pristine glory. This book misleads and should not be used by anyone interested in Vajrayana. Jacoby's writing titillates without illuminating.

Being from the first world she could get this worthless book published from Columbia University Press and get scholars from Columbia University, the University of Cambridge, and

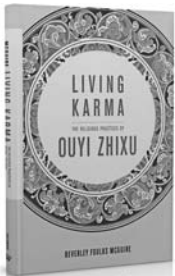
Harvard Divinity School praise her book fulsomely. This is what happens when scholars theorise on Vajrayana without practising it themselves. Recently it has been revealed in American and British courts that all these Ivy League Universities and some of the Russell groups of Universities indulge in quid 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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Living Karma: The Religious Practices of Ouyi Zhixu

Beverley Foulks McGuire

Columbia University Press, 61 West 62 Street, New York, NY 10023, USA. Website: <https://cup.columbia.edu>. 2014. 240 pp. \$60.00. HB. ISBN 9780231168021.

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'.

(Continued on page 486)