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Editorial

Richard Gombrich

When about a year ago we at the OCBS decided to start this journal, we knew that there were already several learned journals in Buddhist studies, and many more which occasionally publish articles on Buddhism. Even so, we felt that there was a need for a publication which, without any drop in intellectual quality, would in some ways be a bit more like a magazine. By this we meant that it should be more accessible to non-specialists, and more varied, with a wide range of contributors, a wide range of subject matter (in terms of both topic and approach), and – we hoped – a correspondingly wider audience. It should also, ideally, carry some news of such things as exhibitions and conferences of relevance to Buddhist studies, and have room for discussion and even controversy.

A remarkable feature of this, our second volume, which I heartily welcome, is the variety of contributors – a fact which cannot but make for variety in the contributions. At the most superficial level, the authors of the fourteen articles and book reviews are drawn from eleven nations. What is far more important, however, is that more than half the pages are written by people who do not hold academic posts. If we are thus enlarging the range of people who make serious contributions to Buddhist studies, I believe that at least we are doing one thing right. In many countries, I know, academics work under such pressure from their employers, with so much teaching and (often pointless) administration, that it is hard for them to produce any research, let alone research which is both original and accessible to non-specialists; I intend to write about this in the near future. For the moment, however, let me celebrate the contributions made by those who for various reasons are *not* employed in academia.

I cannot specify all of them here, but I must draw attention to a couple. Linda Blanchard has never worked in education; as a Buddhist scholar she has no formal training and is virtually self-taught. Yet she has sent me an exciting new interpretation of the Buddha's teaching of dependent origination. She and I realise that so

ambitious a theory is bound to be controversial, and that only time will tell what the world will make of it; but I am confident that at the very least it deserves to be taken seriously. Taking it seriously also meant that I had to break my rule of imposing a limit on articles of ten thousand words, because I could not weaken her presentation of her case by curtailing the amount of evidence that she could present.

Peter Alan Roberts is a self-employed scholar, who earns whatever he does earn as a Tibetan translator and interpreter. He is incapable of blowing his own trumpet. Tucked away near the end of his article is an explanation of the origin of the name Avalokiteśvara. How much effort has been spent on this problem! Peter has found what seems to me must be the solution, but he is so modest that until I prodded him he was mentioning it only in passing, so that it could easily have gone unnoticed.

Analayo has a foot in both worlds, for he does teach part-time – though he is so prolific that no one would ever guess it. Writing here about the Buddha's descent to earth from a heaven after preaching the *abhidharma* to his mother, he has shown it to be “an instance of cross-fertilization between text and art, where an already existing tale is concretized in art and this in turn influences textual accounts.” This too is an exciting discovery. I wonder how many cases of reciprocal influence between text and artistic representation it is possible to find in the history of Buddhism.

I am also particularly pleased that this time we can offer our public five substantial book reviews, again on a wide range of topics. In the final paragraph of my own review I draw attention to something about which we hear too little: how “publishing” has for some unlucky authors become almost meaningless, regardless of the quality of their work. This damages our whole academic environment.

While one of the books reviewed is an exhibition catalogue, we have otherwise not yet succeeded in carrying news and discussion. Whether we can do so must depend on whether we can expand our audience and create a wider community of people interested in Buddhist studies at a serious intellectual level. I can only hope that more scholars, whether amateur or professional, will have the courage to submit their ideas to this journal, and that many more people will realize that they deserve to be read and discussed.