

KOKUBO Kazuo 小久保和夫 *Den shingon'in mandara: Sekai bunmei no shukuzu* 伝真言院曼荼羅～世界文明の縮図 [Mandala from the Shingon'in: Epitome of world culture]. Tokyo: Sanburaito, 1978. 138 pp. ¥850.

Mahayana Buddhism is rich in imagery, and its many deities, represented over the centuries in reliefs, statuary, and drawings, are never more colorfully portrayed than on the religious mandala that can be considered one of the distinguishing forms of Mahayana art.

Mandala are stylized representations of the universe inhabited by Buddhist deities. They interested the Japanese monk Kūkai (posthumously given the title Kōbō Daishi) when he went to T'ang China in 805, so upon his return three years later he brought with him two large and beautiful mandala which over the years have hung in the great Tōdaiji temple and in the Shingon Hall of the Imperial Palace in Kyoto. The two mandala brought back were the two most common types: the *taizōkai* or "womb world," representing movement in the universe from the one to the many, and the *kongōkai* or "diamond world," representing movement from the many to the one. Even at the time, Kūkai's mandala were considered so important as religious and cultural treasures that copies of them were authorized and made about twenty years after they entered Japan.

Kokubo's book deals with the many deities portrayed in these two mandala and the symbolism of the mandala's design. His discussion

is aptly and pleasantly aided by the 65 full-color photographs that accompany the text. Some of the photos, produced in 1973 by the photographer Ishimoto Yasuhiro, were awarded the special Minister of Education's Prize, and they adequately bring out both the color and the details of the original mandala. Each of the book's three chapters centers on a particular theme. Chapter one deals with the ideas of life and death as illustrated in the *taizōkai* mandala. Chapter two reviews the portrayal of light or brightness in the mandala and its relation to divinity and rebirth. Chapter three considers a number of the most important Buddhist symbols for expressing divinity and salvation, especially as seen in the *kongōkai* mandala.

The main thesis advanced by Kokubo is that these two mandala illustrate religious and mythological influences from all over the world. As such they are not merely religious items of importance to Japanese Buddhists, but are, as the subtitle implies, artistic treasures that belong to all mankind. Thus throughout his discussion of the two mandala, Kokubo points out similarities or possible examples of influences from non-Asian cultures on the symbolism seen in the mandala. For example, the design of the mandala, he says, can be compared to the Egyptian pyramids, because if the mandala were made three-dimensional, they would have the shape of a pyramid and so symbolize divine power. He also discusses the several animals and animal-headed deities that appear in the mandala and can also be found in many European and Central Asian cultures. He compares the symbolism of water as a life-giving force as used by the Greeks and Romans (Aphrodite was the goddess of gardens and Venus was born from the sea) with the water vase and flower of life often seen in portrayals of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy.

This is not a specialized research work, but is intended for the general reader. Kokubo might have strengthened the text by briefly describing or characterizing some of the more important Buddhist deities he discusses, since the numerous names appearing in the book become confusing and those not familiar with Mahayana Buddhism will not be able to identify most of them. Clearly Kokubo has chosen to concentrate on discussing the symbolism of the mandala and interpretations of it. Specialists will probably find that they are already familiar with most of the interpretations given, but as an overview of mandala art this book fulfills its purpose. It is a stimulating and pleasant intro-

duction to the world of Buddhist mandala and the centuries of religious and mythological thought that stands behind its symbolism.

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