

Book Review

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Buddhist Studies from India to America: Essays in Honor of Charles S. Prebish. Edited by Damien Keown. London and New York: Routledge, 2006, xxvii + 291 pages. ISBN 0-415-37124-4 (hardback), US \$115.

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If the title *Buddhist Studies from India to America* sounds formidably broad, it is because it reflects the unusually variegated career of the scholar to whom this volume is dedicated, Charles S. Prebish. Prebish has published seventeen books and nearly seventy-five articles ranging from scholarship on early Buddhism in India to Buddhism in contemporary North America. His thirty-year career has produced innovative theories on Buddhist monasticism, ethics, and the development of sectarian Buddhism in India, as well as groundbreaking work on Buddhism in America, and even a book on religion and sports. The essays in this book address a panoply of things Buddhist and include contributions that are as original and wide-ranging as Prebish's own work. They are divided into four sections: "Vinaya studies and ethics," "Buddhist traditions," "Western Buddhism," and "inter-religious dialogue."

In the first section, Steven Heine's chapter on Dōgen's understanding of the precepts represents an example of the best of the scholarship in the volume. "Dōgen and the Precepts, Revisited" delves into Dōgen's historical context, placing him in relation to his predecessors and contemporaries in order to tease out the significance of the new system of sixteen-article precepts he advocated with regard to the theory and practice of Zen. This system was a streamlined version of the precepts that did not include the precept of *pr •imok•a*. While Dōgen placed a great deal of importance on the precepts, he saw them as subordinate to the practice of zazen. Heine suggests that Dōgen propounded the sixteen-article precepts in order to mediate between Esai's insistence that the precepts take precedence over zazen and the antinomian view of Nōnin and his Daruma school, which claimed that since all beings are originally awakened there is no need for precepts.

The "Vinaya studies and ethics" section also includes an interesting essay by the volume's editor, Damien Keown, in which he speculates on the reasons Buddhism never developed ethics as a distinctive branch of theoretical inquiry, even while it has always placed a strong emphasis on morality. This chapter is deeply informed by Keown's work in this subject and contrasts the Buddhist situation with ancient

Greek development of meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. This section also contains Judith Simmer-Brown's reflections on the prospects for a Tibetan-American bhikṣu sangha. Simmer-Brown notes some of the difficulties facing new bhikṣus, especially a lack of "patronage, community, training, and education" (58). In a very different kind of essay, Robert L. Hood discusses the difficulties some Buddhists — especially monks without family ties — face when encountering western medical practice. Using the experience of the Burmese monk, Venerable U Sacca Vamsa, as a case study, Hood stresses the need for monks to have durable power of attorney and to name healthcare decision-makers.

The next section, "Buddhist traditions," offers an assortment of scholarly treatments of Buddhist literature, one translation, and even an anomalous teisho by John Daido Looi. The literature treated here ranges from Indian sūtras to Tibetan commentaries to Japanese Pure Land texts. Michael Bathgate's chapter on *ōjōden* narratives in Pure Land traditions is notable for addressing a neglected genre of Buddhist literature: popular narratives of people who achieved rebirth in Amida's Pure Land. Bathgate argues these popular edifying biographies compiled between the tenth and twelfth centuries in Japan were written to establish karmic connections between those who had achieved rebirth in and those still on the path to the Pure land. Written for encouragement and inspiration, they would eventually clash with Hōnen's insistence on the sole practice of chanting the nembutsu and Shinran's doctrine of grace, as opposed to trying to establish the conditions for rebirth in the Pure Land, oneself. In other offerings, Mavis Fenn gives a close reading of the *Kāṭhanta Sutta* as a foundation for contemporary Engaged Buddhism and Leslie Kawamura provides a translation and interpretation of Mi-pham discussing the three self-natures (*svabhāvas*) in *Yogacāra*.

Two chapters in this section stand out for their penetrating examinations of texts in their historical contexts: those of John Powers and Reginald Ray. Powers' piece on Tsong Kha Pa's distinction between sūtra and tantra stands out as a model of textual scholarship that illuminates the competitive agendas between rival groups in their historical contexts. Powers asks why Tsong Kha Pa, in his *Great Exposition of Secret Mantra* (*sNags rim chen mo*), would compose a text whose central argument is something that was largely taken for granted in his time and place: the soteriological superiority of tantra to sūtra. Powers concludes that the famous Tibetan philosopher had a hidden sectarian agenda: to advance a view of tantra that affirms cenobitic monasticism and adherence to traditional morality while still affirming the superiority of tantra. Tsong Kha Pa makes deity yoga — something entirely compatible with the Vinaya — the essential tantric practice and relegates sexual yoga practices of the highest yoga tantras to a small elite. Why does he do this within the context of a discussion of the superiority of tantra to sūtra? Because, argues Powers, one of the tantric vows — which Tsong Kha Pa no doubt took himself — was to avoid dispute with other tantrikas.

Thus he advanced his reformist agenda through exploring a non-controversial question, embedding within the discussion a polemical and sectarian definition of tantra.

Reginald Ray's piece on the use of the term *citta-mātra* in the *Lankavatrasūtra* asks why there has been such a reductive interpretation and easy dismissal of the *Cittamātra* school in Indian and Tibetan *Mādhyamika* literature. Through a detailed analysis of how this term is used in the *sūtra*, he argues provocatively and convincingly that the Indian and Tibetan *Mādhyamikas*, from *Santideva* to contemporary Tibetan Gelugpas, maintain an unfairly reductionistic view of *Cittamātra* as "idealistic," failing to take into account the subtleties of the term. Ray also locates the *Lankavatrasūtra* as a product of forest yogins, rather than settled monastics, and suggests tantalizing connections between the text and the much later *gzhansong* school of Tibetan Buddhism.

The remaining sections of the book contain an assortment of pieces on topics related to modern Buddhism, along with one chapter on religion and sports. Martin Baumann introduces Paul Dahlke, an early-twentieth-century German Buddhist who was quite influential on the emerging conceptions and practice of Buddhism in Germany, yet who is almost completely ignored outside of Germany. Paul Numrich draws upon his considerable fieldwork in North American urban Buddhist communities to reconsider the analytical usefulness of the concept of "two Buddhisms," arguing that it does in fact remain a useful distinction in understanding the significance of race and ethnicity in Buddhism in North America. Other chapters include Franz Metcalf's interpretation of "experiences of no-self" reported by the practitioners of the Zen Center of Los Angeles in terms of Winnicott's psychological theory; a study by Brian Aitken of the relationship of sports to religion, rooted unfortunately in some rather outdated notions of religion; George Bond's thoughtful account of the Sarvodaya movement's continuities and discontinuities with older forms of Sinhalese Buddhism in Sri Lanka; an attempt by John Keenan to intertwine Buddhist and Christian concepts and critiques of creation, a theological piece that is puzzling for its assumption of a Christian readership ("we Christians"); and an essay by Donald Swearer in praise of the famous Thai reformer Buddhadasa's ecumenical vision of Buddhism and Christianity.

The volume necessarily contains the weakness endemic to the genre of the *Festschrift*: it is something of a grab-bag of many things Buddhist without a coherent thematic center. The essays are so wide-ranging in subject-matter and methodology that few will find all the chapters of interest — yet few students and scholars of Buddhism will fail to find something of interest, either. There are, as I have suggested above, many well researched, original, and interesting essays, and this makes the volume a valuable contribution to a number of sub-fields of Buddhist Studies and to the field as a whole.