

***Buddhist Studies from India to America: essays in honor of Charles S. Prebish*, edited by Damien Keown. Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2005. 292pp., Hb. \$180.00. ISBN-13: 9780415371247.**

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This collection of essays celebrated the 60th birthday of Professor Charles Prebish, with contributions from his friends, colleagues, students and collaborators, mostly based in the U.S.A. or Canada, but also in continental Europe, in Australia, and in the case of the editor, in the UK. The volume honors the outstanding international contribution made by Professor Prebish to Buddhist Studies.

The seventeen chapters are arranged, with some ingenuity on the part of the editor, into four sections representing four major interests of Professor Prebish: *Vinaya* studies and ethics, particular Buddhist traditions, Western Buddhism, and Inter-religious dialogue. In addition to the seventeen essays, there is a prologue outlining and rejoicing in the many contributions made by Professor Prebish to the field of Buddhist Studies, a bibliography of his complete works and an introduction by the editor which summarises the content of each essay together with an explanation of the work of each scholar and in particular their connections with their distinguished colleague. Most of the contributors, whether they identify as Buddhist themselves or not, are academics based in university departments, usually of Religious Studies. However, some are included because of the positions held as ‘insiders’ of their particular Buddhist traditions.

It is interesting how many scholars within Buddhist Studies, such as Charles Prebish himself, are also practitioners of Buddhist paths, which makes difficult any division into ‘academic’ and ‘insider’ perspectives. However, the contributors also include those who identify as Christians and those whose personal affiliations remain undeclared.

In the first section, on *Vinaya* studies and ethics, there are four chapters. The first of these, by Steven Heine, is a fascinating discussion of the origins of, and influences on, the sixteen precepts of Dōgen, examining the reasons behind what seem to be variations in his versions of the precepts, and how Dōgen’s formulations assisted the development of Sōtō Zen. This chapter gives a useful insight into the life and times of the Zen master, and the practical and political and well as philosophical factors which lie behind the development of Sōtō Zen. My mental picture of Dōgen was enhanced by this fascinating discussion.

A leap from thirteenth century China and Japan to the present day USA nevertheless maintains the stress on the practicalities of the lives – and here deaths – of Buddhist monastics. Robert Hood discusses the need for better practical arrangements for the decisions about withdrawing care in the cases of terminally ill monastics, suggesting medical powers of attorney residing with fellow *saṅgha* members or lay supporters. Theoretical debates about Buddhist attitudes

to euthanasia are not always of help in real life situations where decisions have to be taken quickly.

Damien Keown contributes a thought-provoking chapter contending that the Buddhist tradition, though replete with moral precepts, moral advice and discussion of *vinaya* rules, has not really had a discipline of ethics in the sense used in the Western tradition deriving from Greek philosophy. Thus, he argues, the discipline of Buddhist Ethics, as well as the phenomenon labelled 'engaged Buddhism', is actually a new development contingent upon the encounter with the West. Although this is one of those academic 'depends what you mean by...' discussions, there is an important insight here which deserves further consideration.

Finally in this section, there is a useful discussion of the ambiguity of the status of those nuns within Tibetan traditions who have obtained full *bhikṣuṇī* ordination from Chinese, Korean or Vietnamese lineages. Judith Simmer-Brown explains the importance and complexities of questions of legitimacy, the practical difficulties caused by differences between Chinese and Tibetan customs, and the complicating factor of cultural imperialism on the part of some Western Buddhist feminists. Nevertheless, she concludes, for the sake of the future of the tradition, it would probably be good to get this sorted out.

In the second section, on Buddhist traditions, there are six rather disparate chapters, linked by dealing with particular Buddhist literature. Michael Bathgate argues against the emphasis on monastic texts and for more attention to be paid to texts which support the 'real life' Buddhism of the lay majority (although here an educated elite). The example he takes are the tenth to twelfth century *ōjōden* or biographies of people who have reached Amida's realm in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. Such texts played an important role in encouraging faith, but also, from a period before Hōnen and Shinran, provided examples of the karmic conditions leading to a Pure Land rebirth (and thus stimulating good works and acts of repentance) as well as a sense of connection with the great saints who had gone before.

Mavis Fenn's close examination of the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* of the Pāli Canon (*Dīgha Nikāya sutta* 5) gives ammunition to those who seek textual support for lay practice and socially engaged Buddhism. The central tale, a previous life story told by the Buddha in response to a query about sacrifice, gives advice on social welfare, taxation, criminal justice and job creation, arguing that such activity is better than ritual sacrifice as a way of benefiting ruler and community. By pointing out discontinuities in the narrative flow, Fenn argues that the story has been subject to a monastic editing, that is also illustrated by the framing narrative, which subordinates such activity in the world to renunciation of the world. However, freed from this redaction, the central tale can be read as an independent piece of advice for lay people, an alternative rather than lesser path. The message then becomes not to turn from outer ritual to inner contemplation, but to turn from seeking religious merit for oneself to thinking of benefiting others.

Leslie Kawamura provides a Tibetan text and translation of the commentary on the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra* by the nineteenth century Tibetan scholar Mi-pham. The work of Mi-Pham leads to new reflections on the three 'constituent principles of reality' in *Yogācārā* thought and the relationship of the latter with *Madhyamaka*. The translation of *sūnyatā* as 'openness' was interesting, as was the discussion of the relationship of the *sūnyatā* and the 'consummated' level of reality.

The Zen Abbot John Daido Looi uses a *kōan* collected by Dōgen and the commentary thereon to argue for the urgent priority of practical action to help others and the planet, on the part of the relatively well-resourced three million Buddhists in the USA. I am very grateful to the *Rōshi* for introducing me to the concept of ‘wearing socks for others’ which can be understood (or not) at many levels.

John Powers examines the writings of Tsong kha pa to argue that his position on the relationship of *sūtra* and tantra was politically astute in establishing the success of the dGe lugs pa ‘sect’ in the face of the popularity of tantric practice. I appreciated his introductory comment that composing texts in fifteenth century Tibet required a strong motivation, given both the difficulty of doing so and the lack of the professional reward, compared to today’s academics.

Starting with the traditional Tibetan classification of the *Lañkāvatara Sūtra* as a *citta-mātra* text, Reginald Ray analyses the various interpretations of that term, pointing out that the understanding of *citta-mātra* as opposed by Madhyamaka is not the same as that proposed in the *Lañkāvatara Sūtra*. He clarifies the use of the term within this *sūtra*, seeing this text as not really classifiable as Yogācāra, Madhyamaka or Tathāgatagarbha, but having more in common with Mahāmudrā or Ch’an. He usefully points out that the ‘widely used Buddhist hermeneutical strategy of “inclusivism and subordination”’ as a way of dealing with disagreements between texts by ranking them hierarchically, may prevent conflict, but also stops what could be fruitful further dialogue, and acts in the interest of the dominant group.

In the third section, on Western Buddhism, there are three chapters. Martin Baumann discusses the contribution of Paul Dahlke in 1920s Germany in establishing Buddhism as a possible practice for Europeans, by portraying it as a ‘romantic moral heroism’, an experiential religion without dogma, faith or God, a portrait still very influential in Western understandings of Buddhism, in spite of our growing knowledge of its diversity. Franz Metcalf discusses how Zen in the USA can be integrated with the relational psychology of Winnicott, understanding ‘no-self’ as ‘related-self’. Paul Numrich examines the notion of the ‘two Buddhisms’ in the West – that of the ‘ethnic’ communities with roots in countries where Buddhism has been traditional, and that of the western convert. Although this distinction can be over-simplified, in that both wings are diverse and may harbour traditionalists and modernizers for example, there is still some mileage in the idea, especially in the light of the need to recognize the tendency for the ‘convert’ Buddhism to dominate the discourse.

In the final section, on Inter-religious dialogue, there are four chapters. Brian Aitken expounds the spiritual dimension of sport, and criticises its current commodification. George Bond explores how the ‘bottom up’ social revolution of the Sri Lankan Sarvodaya Shramadana movement draws upon both tradition and modernity in its expression of ‘engaged’ Buddhism. John Kenan applies a Mahāyāna perspective to interpret Christian salvation history as a conventional rather than ultimate truth, and argues that the creator God criticized by Buddhists is not the God of Christian theology. And finally, Donald Swearer employs the ecumenical vision of Buddhādāsa to explore how religious traditions that seem outwardly different can learn from each other, and may be at heart more similar than at first appears.

The reviewer did find the summaries of the lives and works of the contributors somewhat hagiographic, but perhaps this is excusable in a celebration volume such as this. As always in such collections, the four sections are somewhat contrived but do allow for readers with particular interests to focus on the most relevant sections. Each reader will find some essays more useful than others, depending on his or her areas of operation. Of the collection, those that were most enlightening to this particular reader were probably those by Steven Heine and Reginald Ray, although I am also grateful to John Kenan for stimulating me to find out who first suggested that God was a verb rather than a noun (it appears to have been Buckminster Fuller) and will treasure the aspiration of wearing socks for others. The collection as a whole though, as for the current reviewer, working on the borders of Buddhist Studies, and more familiar with the U.K. and European scene than the American and Canadian one, can serve as a useful update on a number of diverse and interesting areas of the subject.