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Elaborations on Emptiness: Uses of the Heart Sūtra. By Donald S Lopez, Jr. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. Pp. xii, 264. Hardcover.

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Don Lopez's *The Heart Sūtra Explained* was for years the best book on the *Heart Sūtra* and its commentarial literature available in English. Now it is second best, and has been beaten by a good margin. Lopez has returned to this fertile literature and has completed the task he brilliantly—but only partially—accomplished in his earlier book. The result is a complete anthology of superb translations of the major Indian commentaries on the *sūtra*, and a fine set of essays exploring the multifarious readings and uses of the *sūtra* in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition, including not only the better-known (to Western scholars and practitioners) understandings, as a philosophical and tantric text, but also its use as a *sādhana*, as a single lengthy mantra and as a tool in exorcism. Lopez also presents excellent discussions of the role of commentary and interpretation in the Buddhist traditions, and of the character of Buddhist hermeneutics, using this important set of literature as an illuminating case study of Buddhist hermeneutics.

Lopez includes in their entirety English translations of the *sūtra* itself and the commentaries of Vimalamitra, Atiśa, Kamalaśīla, Śrīsiṃha, Jñānamitra, Praśāstrasena, Mahājāna and Vajrapāṇi. The translations are presented in clear, readable English, with ample notes and discussion of translational and philological issues as well as of divergences between canonical editions. These translations are hence both immediately accessible to the student or scholar of Buddhist philosophy with limited access to Sanskrit or Tibetan, and of interest and use to the more linguistically capable scholar. Their clarity and detail make them valuable as a resource for anyone teaching a course on the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature or on Buddhist hermeneutics.

The expository essays address a range of topics, including the dramatic and historical persona of the *saṃgitikartā*, or rapporteur, of the *sūtra*; the divergent uses of the *sūtra* and the structure of the commentarial tradition and enterprise the text occasions. Each is packed with useful information and a plethora of subtle insights into the text and the religious and philosophical culture in which it and its commentarial sequelae figure. It is hard to imagine a reader who will not learn a great deal from them. On the other hand, some of the essays wander a bit. Lopez at times is so keen to fill a chapter with information and to touch each base that an essay which begins by developing a clear line of analysis or argument peters out into endless digressions and byways. Sharper expository focus could draw these threads together, but as they stand most are difficult to take as unitary discussions.

Chapter one (“Who Heard the *Heart Sūtra*?”) is a good example of this problem. Lopez provides the reader with a wealth of information con-

cerning the conflicting answers given in the commentarial tradition to the question regarding “the referent of the ‘I’ of ‘Thus did I hear’ (*evaṃ mayā śrutam*).”[19] He hints at, but does not really take on, the vexed problem that occurs to so many heterodox readers of these texts, of identifying “the moment that is so difficult to imagine, when a monk put stylus to palm leaf and penned the words, *evaṃ mayā śrutam*...”[45]. But the essay meanders from a survey of the commentarial debates to an inconclusive discussion of the problem of authenticating the Mahāyāna *sūtras* to a long tangent on orality and literacy in the Buddhist canon and finally to a comparative discussion of the status of speech and word in Buddhist and non-Buddhist Indian philosophy. By the end of this excursion the reader has learned a lot. One thing that remains unclear, however, is what the topic of the essay is, how its various segments are meant to fit together and why the question Lopez poses is so important to him and to the tradition he represents in this volume.

The third chapter is called “The *Heart Sūtra* as Tantra.” Never was a chapter so misleadingly named. For this essay contains only the briefest discussion of the use of the *sūtra* as a tantra or of its status as a tantric text in the canon. That is too bad, because these are interesting topics, and Kamalaśīla’s commentary certainly raises issues worthy of further exploration. The greater part of the essay is devoted instead to a discussion of the question “What is a tantra?” As Lopez signals from the epigraphic use of a remark by Wittgenstein cautioning against the search for single property or an illuminating disjunction of properties possessed by all items designated by a common term, Lopez resists the temptation to offer a definition of “tantra,” and instead emphasises the heterogeneity of texts and practices referred to as “tantric.” The chapter ends with Lopez suggesting “the possibility that tantra is a floating signifier in India and Tibet, gathering to itself over many centuries a range of contradictory qualities.” [103] While we should applaud the absence of a gratuitous bang at the conclusion of this discussion, this is a bit too much of a whimper. It signals more the defeat of an exploration than the conclusion that no success is possible, and is especially unsatisfying given the lack of a serious attempt to delimit the range of uses of the term, or the textual and practical distinctions it is used to draw. The diversity may indeed be beyond illuminating comprehension in a formula. But there is no reason to opt for the “zero signification” position at which Lopez leaves us. Even Wittgenstein, in the epigraphic passage, indicates that a single thread may emerge from a set of distinct overlapping fibres.

The fifth chapter—on the *sūtra* as *sādhana*—is considerably more textually focussed and programmatically coherent than these earlier es-

says. Lopez first presents a close, clear and informative reading of the Dārikapa's *sādhana* followed by some apposite discussion of the relationship between *sādhana* and Vedic sacrifice. The second half of the chapter is a detailed and highly informative discussion of the history and role of visualisation in Mahāyāna meditational practice, and of the role of *sādhana* in linking a *sūtra* to a *maṇḍala*, and so in connecting tantra to *sūtra* in practice. The analysis is closely anchored to a careful exploration of the *maṇḍala* associated with Dārikapa's *sādhana*. Things get a bit bizarre, however, when without any warning or motivation Lopez presents a Freudian reading of the final moments of the visualisation—the unification of the Buddha with the goddess Prajñāpāramitā as an act of incest, and hence as the violation of a taboo. There is simply no textual or other internal justification for this jarring intrusion of psychoanalytic theory, and no evident insight into the *sādhana* or into the *sūtra* thereby gained. It stands as an unmotivated disfiguration of an otherwise superb exposition.

In his discussion (chapter nine) of the *Heart Sūtra* as a tool in exorcism Lopez introduces the Western philosophical reader to a use of this text little noted in Western discussions of this literature and its role in the Buddhist tradition. More importantly, he uses this intriguing phenomenon as a focus for a very sharp discussion of the need to note more explicitly the tradition's own conception of the tight relation between philosophy and practice so easily divorced in Western approaches to Buddhism and for an illuminating exploration of the uses to which such exotic practices have been put in the history of orientalist approaches to Tibet and to the Tibetan Buddhist traditions. They have, he points out, been used as a basis for the castigation of primitive “Lamaism” but have also been conveniently ignored by those wishing to preserve a vision of a modern or postmodern, hyper-intellectual tradition. In either case, Lopez points out, the identification of an artificial divide between philosophy and these practices both departs from the tradition's self-understanding and falsifies the role of these texts in their Indo-Tibetan context. This chapter is an excellent warning through an exploration of a case study against certain distortions endemic to the comparative enterprise.

The tenth chapter of the book (“Commentators Ancient and Postmodern”) follows nicely on the preceding chapter and is a gem. It is in fact among the best essays on the problems of translation, cross-cultural interpretation and the structure, context, goals and methods of comparative philosophy I have read. Lopez draws on insights from Foucault and Nietzsche as well as from Gadamer and Halbfass. He explores questions in the methodology of translation of texts such as the *Heart Sūtra* and its commentaries that themselves appear in multiple languages in their home

tradition, and which themselves are polyvalent not only globally but even lexically, containing many words whose lexical meaning is the subject of complex commentarial debate, demonstrating the challenges and philosophical as well as philological choices involved in choosing English translations for such complex and contested Sanskrit or Tibetan terms. This discussion is rich in examples and in philosophical insight, and should be read by anyone contemplating translation of Asian philosophical or religious texts into English.

In this chapter Lopez also discusses of the nature of comparative philosophy as an intellectual enterprise. He addresses the difficulties involved in the choice of comparative lenses through which to view alien texts; the complex political and academic agendas that provide the context for the enterprise. He also appropriately criticises the tendency of Western philosophical interpreters to focus on decontextualised texts and to ignore the historical and cultural conditions in the context of which they were read and understood by the traditions in which they figure, as well as the complementary tendency to take the Indo-Tibetan tradition's own doxography on faith. Finally, he offers insightful remarks on the dangers of procrustean interpretative beds and the difficulties in engendering genuine dialogue between traditions. That he touches on so much in such brief compass is remarkable. That he brings all of this together in a powerfully argued and extremely helpful essay in metaphilosophy is most impressive.

There is not space in this review to discuss the many issues this last essay raises. But there is one comment which, in the context of an important acknowledgment in Lopez's preface, deserves note. Lopez notes that "it is significant that no Tibetan names come to mind when we list modern Asian contributors to the field of comparative philosophy." [250] This is true in one sense: Tibetans have not yet written essays or books in comparative philosophy. But Tibetan scholars have contributed enormously to the enterprise of comparative philosophy, often in under-acknowledged roles, as colleagues of Western comparativists. This contribution does not only consist in their teaching Westerners texts, or in their discussing the interpretations of these texts with their Western students and colleagues, though this is in itself an enormous contribution. Some Tibetan scholars have developed keen interests in Western philosophy and in the comparative enterprise and have engaged in serious comparative dialogue — both concerning particular texts, traditions and ideas and concerning methodology — in academic fora with Western comparative philosophers. One might mention here the most Ven. Professor Samdhong Rinpoche, the Ven. Geshe Namgyal Wangchen, the Ven. Geshe Ngawang Samten and the late Ven. Geshe Lobsang Gyatso, as well as the Ven. Professor Geshe Yeshe Thap-

chas.

The last mentioned deserves special note here. He is credited in the preface for his assistance to Lopez in understanding some of the commentaries collected in this volume. He is also credited in my own work, in that of Georges Dreyfus, of José Cabezón, John Powers and of many other contemporary Western scholars of Buddhist philosophy. He has contributed enormously to the translation and interpretation of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy for Western audiences and to the entrance of these texts and ideas into cross-cultural philosophical discourse. I pause in this context only to draw together the numerous acknowledgments to this magnificent teacher scattered in prefaces and footnotes throughout our literature into a single comprehensive acknowledgment and to call attention to one kind of invaluable Tibetan contribution to the comparative enterprise.

There is an annoying lack of editorial polish to an otherwise so carefully prepared volume. It is clear that Lopez assembled the book from a number of pre-existing essays and translations. Perforce, some of these once independent pieces shared passages of prose or footnotes. Unfortunately this duplication is preserved in the present book, so that one occasionally encounters a paragraph or a footnote in a later chapter that one has already encountered in an earlier chapter. This is at least a minor annoyance, and should have been avoided in the production of the book. More seriously, the volume lacks a subject index, a glossary, and a citation index. Each of these would have been useful, as many topics, technical terms and passages of text are discussed in widely separated parts of the text. The reader interested in the treatment of a particular topic or a particular passage from the range of perspectives Lopez presents will find it difficult to draw relevant references together. Similarly the student interested in the handling of particular Sanskrit or Tibetan terms will not find it easy to track down relevant information.

In this review I have perhaps drawn too much attention to the shortcomings of this volume. So let me emphasise in closing that *Elaborations on Emptiness* is a superb achievement: It is by far the best and most complete treatment of the *Heart Sūtra* in any Western language; it collects between two covers not only a complete set of excellent translations of the major commentaries on the *sūtra* but also a series of highly informative essays, and presents a synoptic vision of the role of this crucial text in the Mahāyāna tradition, and consequently a marvellous case study of Mahāyāna hermeneutic method and textual history. This book is required reading for anyone interested in Buddhist hermeneutics, in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature or in Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy, literature and religious culture. It will prove a valuable scholarly resource and an excellent text for use in

upper level undergraduate or postgraduate seminars in Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist literature or hermeneutic theory.