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Speaking For Buddhas: Scriptural Commentary in Indian Buddhism by Richard F. Nance (review)

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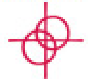

Philosophy East and West, Volume 63, Number 4, October 2013, pp. 660-664 (Review)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press
DOI: 10.1353/pew.2013.0064

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and death are Shinto and Buddhist "in name only," deriving instead from folk religiosity, which allows for the rich variety of assimilation found today in the modern urban world of contemporary Tokyo (p. 183).

Given the important questions raised by Heine regarding the narrowness of current interpretive models in the study of Japanese religion, the contributions of *Sacred High City, Sacred Low City* cannot be overstated. Taking a significant step in moving Western scholarship beyond the gaze upon the Japanese other, Heine has offered a shift in paradigm that will change the direction of this field for years to come. Undergraduate and graduate courses on Japanese cultural and religious studies or on the confluence of contemporary religious practice and material consumption would be well served by adding this text to required reading. However, one important question that still remains is the place of text in Japanese sectarian traditions. If all Japanese religious life is fundamentally derived from pre-sectarian, pre-writing folk practices, and is Shinto or Buddhist "in name only," then how are we to understand the meaning and use of writing in the formation of these traditions, and how would this relate to identifiable differences between Japanese Buddhism and both Chinese and Indo-Tibetan systems? Having moved from the textual to the phenomenological dimensions of Japanese religions, is it possible to return to the text with greater clarity and possible insights into what is unique about the Japanese use of written materials?

Speaking For Buddhas: Scriptural Commentary in Indian Buddhism. By Richard F. Nance. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. Pp. 298. ISBN 978-0-231-15230-3.

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In *Speaking for Buddhas: Scriptural Commentary in Indian Buddhism,* Richard Nance offers the first book-length treatment of the interpretive models and principles guiding a large body of commentarial literature produced by Indian Mahāyāna Buddhists in the second half of the first millennium in northern India. He charts the conventions, protocols, and ideals these authors invoked in their efforts to "speak" for Buddhas as they wrote commentaries on *sūtra, vinaya,* and *abhidharma* texts. He is concerned less with outlining the formal lexical and syntactic principles of Buddhist scholasticism, and more with the normative and rhetorical assumptions guiding exegetical practice. He shows that Indian Buddhist authors were preoccupied with questions about the nature of scripture and commentary as complex discursive events, as they explored the qualities of Buddhas' utterances and what it could mean to speak for and about them. Nance's project is welcome and overdue in Buddhist and premodern Indian textual studies, particularly when we consider that intellectual progress in medieval South Asia was forged largely through commentarial interpretation and the elaboration of root texts, and yet note how little attention has been given to how these processes worked and were understood by their practitioners.

Nance's study is impressive in its range of both texts considered and questions posed. The first chapter, "Models of Speaking," looks at two primers widely recited

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(according to the Chinese pilgrim Yijing) at Nālandā, the *Śatapañcāśatka* and the *Catuḥśataka,* for how they praise the Buddha's speech and model ideal speech for Buddhists. He also dips into the Pāli *sutta*s (which he takes as representative of the *āgamic* literature) on the nature of the Buddha's speech, and he considers the proscriptive protocols of monks' speech in the *Prātimokṣasūtra,* strictures that go much further than the usual accounts of "right speech," and that demonstrate how seriously worries about authority and misrepresentation were taken in normative monastic contexts.

The Buddha's speech *(buddhavacana),* according to the first verse of the *Śatapañcāśatka,* is "well-worded, of great meaning, true and sweet; profound, plain, or both; succinct or detailed" (p. 16). Nance carefully parses this verse to structure his treatment of this text. These attributes are commonly seen in Buddhist commentaries, and encompass well-known tropes of being excellent in both meaning *(artha)* and phrasing *(vyañjana),* and capable of being stated in brief *(saṃkṣiptena)* or in detail *(vistarena).* The second verse of the text suggests that these qualities establish evidence of the Buddha's omniscience (p. 16), because, it would seem, uttering only speech that is at once sweet, beneficial, *and* true—or else remaining silent altogether—may be possible only in a condition of omniscience. Nance rightly observes that one of the important and admired features of the Buddha's speech is the ways it "points in two directions at once": it is universally true and beneficial for all who hear it regardless of their capacities, even while it "is generally—always and everywhere—well-suited to the particularity of local context(s)—contexts that may differ as to time, place, language, speaker, and audience" (pp. 21, 22).

Those who hear the Buddha's speech are said to have the profound sense that "this teaching is for me alone" (in the words of the *Catuḥśataka* [p. 20]), and experience the words as uniquely tailored to their singular condition. Although Nance does not discuss this verse, the idea of "for me alone" is interesting. It relates to an important thread in the book, namely the ways that the Dharma—the Buddha's speech—is simultaneously "what is responsive to, and what is dissociable from, the vicissitudes of circumstance" (p. 123). The inexhaustible Dharma always transcends, even as it finds expression in, "evanescent teachings offered in particular idioms, languages, and dialects," and, I may add, is directed to particular individuals who experience it as speaking to their unique and idiosyncratic conditions. Nance begins to gesture to some of the interesting possibilities here, but there is more to explore in these sources on how these commentators understood the challenges of omniscient knowledge finding expression only through the limited, particular, and always localized conditions and instantiations of human speech.

Chapter 2, "Models of Instruction," considers the idealized portrait that the texts paint of the Dharma preacher, and the "discursive pressures" that the textual traditions imposed on those who would speak in the Buddha's name (p. 78). In this chapter, Nance looks across a number of texts, including the *Śikṣāsamuccaya,* the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra,* the *Dharmasaṅgīti,* the *Daśabhūmika,* the *Akṣayamatinirdeśa,* and the *Arthaviniścayasūtra* (many of these texts are little studied, and some are extant only in Sanskrit fragments and Tibetan translations), for how they depict

the "pedagogical skill set" of the ideal preacher. He focuses on how the texts describe the "four discriminations" (of *dharma*s, of things, of expression, and of eloquence) that make a bodhisattva's teaching effective. In various ways these discriminations track the dual emphasis on content and form that pervades so much Buddhist discourse on effective speech: the discriminations of *dharma*s (taken by some of the texts to refer to linguistic forms that designate things and meaning) and things (*artha,* the things and meanings designated by linguistic forms) concern *what* is expressed, while the discriminations of expression (having the capacity for unhindered speech and the ability to use vernaculars) and eloquence (speech that is "coherent and free," as one text puts it [p. 64]) concern *how* it is expressed.

These finely grained distinctions about what comprise knowledge and communication suggest an idealized educational paradigm in which Dharma preachers are coached in these nuanced forms of instruction, even as the ears of their audiences are trained to hear these qualities of speech. Such discriminations are important, Nance suggests, in a competitive religious and philosophical environment of other Buddhist preachers and proselytizers. His close work on these texts uncovers some dispute among them on what these qualities entail, and he portrays a quite textured account of the divergences of views about what authoritative discourse required and what was at stake as Dharma preachers attempted both to preserve and to interpret the Dharma. The tasks of preservation and interpretation sometimes pull away from one another and Nance demonstrates that Buddhist scholastics were alive to the tensions between preserving the Buddha's teachings unharmed while also expanding and interpreting them for their own and future audiences.

Chapter 3, "Models of Argument," turns to Buddhist epistemology to tackle problems of the reliability of testimony as authoritative knowledge. It sketches briefly Indian *pramāṇa* theory to explore the ways in which epistemology informed Śāntarakṣita's and Kamalaśīla's thinking on textual interpretation. He shows that both philosophers were aware of a central problem in interpretation: how to make sense of what Nance calls "interpretive misfires" (in which a speaker's utterance conveys meaning to an audience, but not that intended by the speaker) and "performative misfires" (when speakers fail to say what they intend to say). The latter are more problematic in that they demonstrate that there is no invariable concomitance between desired meaning and what is uttered. This means that interpretation is not a matter of inference (one of the two forms of reliable knowledge, along with perception, accepted by Buddhist philosophers), as Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla would have it, since inference requires relationships of invariable or causal concomitance. That Buddhist epistemology falls short in explaining how meaning is transmitted in human speech and how interpretation works becomes grist for Nance's mill as he urges us to look beyond philosophy to a much broader set of intellectual resources offered by the tradition as it grapples with fundamental issues of how speakers and texts convey knowledge.

Some of the important questions concerning the relationships between speech (or text) and meaning not resolved satisfactorily by the philosophical texts are taken up carefully in a genre that has not been studied much by modern scholars (although

Nance helpfully reviews the contributions of Cabezón, Schoening, Skilling, and Verhagen to this area). The final chapter, "Models of Explication," investigates commentarial guides. South Asian Buddhists produced manuals for exegesis, the best known of which are the Pāli *Nettipakaraṇa* and the *Peṭakopadesa.* But Mahāyāna authors, most prominently Vasubandhu, whose *Vyākhyāyukti* is the main focus of this chapter, also produced such guidebooks. Nance also mentions, largely in footnotes, some comparative points with this text and the *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* and the *Vivaraṇasaṃgrahaṇī,* and provides translations of relevant portions of all three of these guides in his appendixes with the hope that they will stimulate and facilitate further study of this neglected corner of Buddhist textual studies. Vasubandhu presents five aspects of an ideal commentary that constitute its structure: its summary meaning *(piṇḍārtha),* its purpose or point *(prayojana),* the meaning of its phrases *(padārtha),* the connections *(anusaṃdhi)* to other passages and ideas in Buddhist teaching, and finally, objections and rejoinders *(codyaparihāra).* This structure, with its elements of summary meaning, purpose, and connections, indicates that Vasubandhu had a vision of commentary as something that can systematize and synthesize a *sūtra's* meaning as a whole; commentarial services go far beyond glossing words and phrases in the root text (although modern scholars have sometimes deployed them solely for this purpose). Although Vasubandhu devotes most of his work to *padārtha,* that is, how the scope of meanings of phrases can be elaborated or cut off, he clearly saw commentaries as systematizing textual Dharma through their very intricate intertextual and doctrinal exegetical practices.

Nance notes that despite Vasubandhu's treatment of the five aspects above, for the most part his pedagogical practice in training would-be commentators involves not general principles, but rather particular examples. His guide is not so much a handbook of procedures but a paradigm or exemplary illustration of how commentary is to be carried out. As he reads this text and others, Nance is sensitive to the ways in which these texts often teach: less by naming explicit procedures and protocols and more by their own rhetorical devices, aesthetic forms, and highly particularized models of commentarial style. For example, often in Vasubandhu's text we find that rhetorical form recapitulates content (p. 114), and he seems to be *performing* what is important rather than explicitly stating principles whereby it might be learned. There is a subtlety in this style of teaching that Nance appreciates as he tries to understand Vasubandhu's distinctive values of intellectual training. Vasubandhu has a very specific idea about who his audience should be: those who have "heard much," who can grasp what they have heard, and who can build up what they have heard (p. 103). The text is concerned not only with models of commentarial instruction but also with what it takes to be an ideal student, the crucial other half of the equation in textual transmission. There is more we should study here—Nance signals that his efforts are as yet preliminary—on how the text is creating its own ideal reception and audience by cultivating intellectual taste and expectation.

While still an initial effort to map terrain that needs further exploration, this is an important book because it can help us learn how to read Buddhist texts better. Nance explores a substantial body of neglected texts and introduces their theories about

what texts are, how speech communicates meaning, and what intellectual work and education ought to look like. For one thing, we begin to see that the assumptions of medieval Mahāyāna scholastics are not always the same as those of modern textual scholars, although readers may wish that Nance was more explicit about how the exegetical values in this tradition differ from those of modern hermeneutics and philology, and what the entailments of different assumptions might be. It is also unclear, as Nance notes, how generalizable the book's findings are to other Buddhist thinkers, but within its own domain (Indian and Tibetan Mahāyāna), its careful excavation of the ways that these commentators reflected on their own practices can make us better readers of their intellectual production. His work opens up further study of the texts and questions he considers and paves the way for comparative treatment of these exegetes with those in other Buddhist traditions. Also, while the book does not attempt this, contextualizing these Buddhist texts within the larger Indian intellectual milieu that may have influenced or been influenced by the intellectual values they promoted is another crucial component of this kind of project. The book is stronger on excavation and description than analysis, but, on the whole, it is an impressive first attempt, and it presages more good things to come from this scholar. Finally, readers should note that this study is both concise and dense, and best read carefully with its notes (but those doing so should be warned of a glitch in the numbering of the footnotes that begins on page 50, but is resolved on page 62).

An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Perspectives on Reality, Knowledge, and Freedom. By Bina Gupta. New York: Routledge, 2012. Pp. xiii + 343. Hardcover $37.98, ISBN 978-0-415-80002-0.

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In *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Perspectives on Reality, Knowledge, and Freedom,* Professor Bina Gupta undertakes an ambitious task. Her purpose for putting this book together is threefold. The first reason is to show Western readers that Indian philosophy is a discipline that is both intellectual and rigorous (p. xi). Second, Gupta desires to present each Indian philosophical system on its own terms and then subject it to criticism. Finally, she proposes to introduce students who have familiarity with Western philosophy to the basic concepts of Indian philosophy so that they may procure an understanding of the Indian mind (p. xi).

Through her first point, that Indian philosophy should be understood to be intellectual and rigorous, Gupta immediately makes two things clear. First, throughout the book, she will illumine some of the scholarly dialectic surrounding Indian philosophy. For example, a bit later in the book she highlights the debate surrounding the issue of reality in the Advaita system. Some scholars in the past, such as Indologist Paul Hacker, have argued that there is no basis for ethical action in an *unreal* world. Gupta clarifies that this is a misunderstanding of the Advaita distinction between real and empirical (p. 238). The world is illusory but not unreal. Thus, one remains re-

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