

Garfield on Engle, 'The Inner Science of Buddhist Practice: Vasubandhu's Summary of the Five Heaps with Commentary by Sthiramati'

Artemus B. Engle. *The Inner Science of Buddhist Practice: Vasubandhu's Summary of the Five Heaps with Commentary by Sthiramati.* Tsadra Foundation Series. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2009. xiii + 557 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55939-322-5.

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Inner Science of Buddhist Practice

Artemus B. Engle has made a valuable contribution to the contemporary Buddhist studies literature and to those who teach Buddhist philosophy. He places before us, in a single volume, an excellent overview of the Buddhist path and of Buddhist philosophy as seen from a dGe lugs perspective; a useful translation into English of Vasubandhu's *Pañcaskhandhaprakaraṇa*; a carefully edited Tibetan version of the text (*phung po lnga'i rab tu byed pa*); and for the first time a complete and reliable translation of Sthiramati's commentaries on that text, *Pañcaskhandhaprakaraṇavibhāṣyaṃ* (*phung po lnga'i rab tu byed pa bye brag tub shad pa*). Engle also offers a reconstruction of Vasubandhu's Sanskrit text.

Vasubandhu's and Sthiramati's texts are each classics of Buddhist philosophy. They are important to students and historians of Buddhism, to practitioners,

and to any philosophers interested in Buddhist philosophy of mind and psychology as it is developed in the Yogācāra tradition. We are now witnessing a welcome development of interest in Sthiramati's important commentaries, and in Yogācāra contributions to Buddhist phenomenology. This volume is an important part of this literature.

There is a lot to like about the extensive (over two hundred pages) introductory essay. Engle presents a detailed exposition of Buddhism as a graduated path to awakening, beginning with an account of the nature of saṃsāra, karma, and refuge; discussing the nature of suffering, the objects of mindfulness, and the importance of meditative states; and concluding with an overview of the Mahāyāna. The presentation is erudite, extraordinarily well illustrated with a wide range of appropriate scriptural references, and extremely clear. One has the feeling of being present at a Dharma talk by an exceptionally pedagogically talented *geshe*. This would be an excellent text to use when teaching students about Tibetan understandings of the nature of the Buddhist path.

Not every reader will be happy with this introduction, however. In particular, the voicing is problematic. Engle does not defend the interpretation and perspective he provides, or any of the (often highly problematic) arguments by Indian or Tibetan Buddhist scholars. Nor does he criticize this perspective or any of the arguments presented, even to the extent of noting alternative viewpoints within or outside of the Buddhist tradition. He does not even indicate that he is presenting a *particular* viewpoint, to which there *are* alternatives. Despite the fact that the general picture, the arguments advanced by those who adopt it, and the interpretations of texts that underlie those arguments and that interpretation of Buddhism are in fact contested, they are all presented without critical perspective as unproblematic truth. So it does feel very much like a Dharma talk--a very good Dharma talk. The voice is clear, but the fact that this is a *particular* voice among many is never made

clear, and so those hoping for a more critical treatment in a volume such as this will be disappointed.

The translation of Vasubandhu's root text is very good. Of course there are places where other choices could have been made, and translators can always find a great deal to argue about, but I will avoid that temptation. For the most part, the translation is faithful to the sense of the text and to its grammar, and can be used by the student without worry. Engle does introduce helpful section titles into the root text. These are not present in the Tibetan text itself, however, and he does not signal this. So the unwary reader may be misled into thinking that the section breaks are Vasubandhu's.

There are a few translation choices that are so idiosyncratic and, I believe, misleading, that they deserve note. These are not *errors*, so much as they are injudicious renderings that are bound to mislead those who do not read Tibetan or Sanskrit, that is, those who are most dependent on the translation. I will note only two here, as these are the ones I take to be the most egregious--one in the context of the introductory essay and one in the context of the *Pañcaskhandhaprakaraṇa* itself.

Engle translates *dran pa nye bar bzhag pa bzhi* (*catavāri smṛtyupasthānāni*) as "the four closely-placed recollections." While this rendering might have some *lexical* merit, it is seriously misleading as a *translation* and renders the contexts in which this important phrase occurs unintelligible. In English, "recollection" refers to the memory of an episode, and "closely held" indicates that something is in fact grasped tightly, or cherished. An Anglophone reader of this translation would then expect that the *dran pa nye bar bzhag pa bzhi* are cherished memories of episodes in the past. But of course they are not. In this context *dran pa* clearly means "mindfulness" or "attention," and *nye bar bzhag pa* refers not to something already accomplished, but to that which "is to be done." A better English

translation of the Tibetan (or Sanskrit) phrase is hence "the four objects of intense mindfulness." Thus we can say that one should be intensely mindful of the unsatisfactoriness of saṃsāra, the impurity of conditioned phenomena, impermanence, and selflessness, whereas it would be bizarre to say that we should cherish memories of them.

In translating Vasubandhu's text, Engle translates *rnam par rig byed ma yin pa*[*i gzugs*] as "noninformative [form]" and *rnam par rig byed* as "informative." Here, even the *lexical* justification is strained, and the English phrase positively misleading regarding the Tibetan and the philosophical point at issue. In English, to be informative is to *convey information*, and to be noninformative is to fail to do so. But the distinction between these two kinds of material form is not a distinction between one that conveys and one that fails to convey information, but rather between one that is *evident* or *apparent* to ordinary perception and one that is not, in virtue of being is more subtle, less material. This is made clear in Sthiramati's commentary. These passages in the commentary would make perfect sense were these terms translated as "non-evident form" and "evident form," but are incomprehensible on the present reading. Fortunately, there are few problems such as these in otherwise very impressive translations.

The translation of Sthiramati's commentary (with the aforementioned exception) is remarkably clear. The English is fluid, and the philosophical sense apparent. The text is cluttered with a few too many bracketed insertions for my taste (if you need more English words than Tibetan words in translating, use them without apology!), but is very readable and precise.

It is very useful to have a good Tibetan edition of *Pañcaskhandhaprakaraṇa* (*phung po lnga'i rab tu byed pa*) in this volume. Engle has done us a real service in collating a number of canonical editions into a reliable text (and it is printed in a lovely, easily readable font). It is a pity that he did not also

provide the Tibetan text for the Sthiramati commentary, which is harder to come by, and which is a beautiful text, worthy of being made easily accessible to a broader audience. And just as the English translation of the Vasubandhu text invites the reader to compare the Tibetan, the English translation of the Sthiramati generates a longing for a ready Tibetan edition of his commentary.

Engle also includes in this volume a reconstruction of the Sanskrit of Vasubandhu's text. This, while an interesting exercise, is of more dubious value for two reasons. First, while such reconstructions purport to get us closer to an original text, they in fact take us one step further away, going not back to the root of the Tibetan translation, but from the Tibetan to a new Sanskrit text, which, if not handled with great care, can become a faux authority with respect to the interpretation of the Tibetan from which it was generated. Engle notes this problem, and the speculative nature of his reconstruction. Second, as Engle notes, a Sanskrit text of *Pañcaskhandhaprakaraṇa* found in the Potala has been recently edited and will soon be published by scholars from Beijing and Vienna, and so whatever value a reconstruction might have had will be diminished.

The introduction and the translations are very well documented with extensive, very useful notes and critical apparatus. Many of the notes are rich in explanation of terms and philosophical ideas. The bibliography is extensive and itself is a useful scholarly resource. And as usual, Snow Lion has done a lovely job producing this book. It is well-printed, easy to read, and free of typesetting errors.

We should all be grateful to Engle for this volume. It bespeaks great scholarship and erudition, clear thought, and a commitment to careful, clear editing and translation. Whatever small complaints I have are minor when compared with this enormous accomplishment. I recommend this volume to anyone interested in Yogācāra thought or in Buddhist psychology and

philosophy of mind more generally. It will be a valuable reference volume and an excellent text to use in advanced classes on Buddhist philosophy.

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