



The Making of Buddhist Modernism

By David L. McMahan

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A great deal of Buddhist literature and scholarly writing about Buddhism of the past 150 years reflects, and indeed constructs, a historically unique modern Buddhism, even while purporting to represent ancient tradition, timeless teaching, or the "essentials" of Buddhism. This literature, Asian as well as Western, weaves together the strands of different traditions to create a novel hybrid that brings Buddhism into alignment with many of the ideologies and sensibilities of the post-Enlightenment West.

In this book, David McMahan charts the development of this "Buddhist modernism." McMahan examines and analyzes a wide range of popular and scholarly writings produced by Buddhists around the globe. He focuses on ideological and imaginative encounters between Buddhism and modernity, for example in the realms of science, mythology, literature, art, psychology, and religious pluralism. He shows how certain themes cut across cultural and geographical contexts, and how this form of Buddhism has been created by multiple agents in a variety of times and places. His position is critical but empathetic: while he presents Buddhist modernism as a construction of numerous parties with varying interests, he does not reduce it to a mistake, a misrepresentation, or fabrication. Rather, he presents it as a complex historical process constituted by a variety of responses -- sometimes trivial, often profound -- to some of the most important concerns of the modern era.

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Editorial Review

Review

"With David McMahan's *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, the study of modern Buddhism has reached a new level of maturity. This sweeping and sophisticated analysis of the ways in which westerners and Asians alike have constructed new forms of Buddhism under the pressures of modernity is thoroughly disillusioning, in the best sense of the word. McMahan shows that much of what has been written and said about Buddhism in the modern era only can be understood against the background of dominant western discourses. Trenchant but fair, erudite yet lucid, this book should be required reading for any serious student of Buddhism, and will be appreciated as well by those interested in intellectual history, cultural studies, or, simply, the inquiry into modernity." --Roger R. Jackson, Stephen R. Lewis, Jr. Professor of Religion and the Liberal Arts, Carleton College

"David McMahan offers readers a theoretically sophisticated analysis of the development of new modes of thought and discourse in the Buddhist religion since the latter part of the nineteenth century. Grounded in a sound understanding of premodern Buddhist ideas, this work effectively unravels the complex ways in which 'Buddhism' has been adapted to fit the theoretical commitments and tacit understandings of people living in the modern world." --Stephen C. Berkwitz, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Missouri State University

"This is an exceptionally well-written and imaginative piece of scholarship. David McMahan treats in great depth many different facets of Buddhist modernism including art and creativity, meditation and monastic ideals, and science. The writing is clear, straightforward and to the point, and reflects an excellent understanding of how Buddhism fits into the larger scheme of modern religiosity and the development of modern society more generally." --Steven Heine, author of *Zen Skin, Zen Marrow: Will the Real Zen Buddhism Please Stand Up?*

About the Author

David L. McMahan is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Franklin & Marshall College in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahayana Buddhism* and of articles on both Buddhism in South Asia and Buddhism and modernity.

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