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# The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition

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hermeneutical distance when he quotes the witnesses of missionaries and believers without filtering through an analytical lens. The bibliography needs a great deal of expansion by reflecting scholarship of the last four decades. There is no doubt that Chung raised significant issues four decades ago, yet the book leaves a great deal to be desired, which has already been fulfilled by following generations.

MIHWA CHOI, *Chicago, Illinois*.

COLEMAN, JAMES WILLIAM. *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. 265 pp. \$25.00 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper).

Arguing that a significantly new form of Buddhism is emerging, this book represents a valuable contribution to our sociological understanding of Buddhism in the West and particularly in the United States. Included in its generous content is a wealth of quantitative sociological data harvested from surveys that add a much-needed empirical thrust to the academic study of American Buddhism. These quantitative data, which overrepresent more dedicated, rather than less dedicated, practitioners, arise from the four strands of Buddhism in the West that James William Coleman describes: Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, vipassana, and nonaffiliated. Much of these data either critically respond to issues current in the field or raise genuinely new questions. This alone makes this study essential reading for anyone with serious interest in the field.

Yet Coleman, a sociology professor at California Polytechnic State University, recognizes the limitations of even these riches and thus augments his study with qualitative data and analyses based on library research, interviews, informal conversations with Buddhists, and his own fifteen-year experience as a Buddhist. Into the presentation of survey results Coleman weaves short biographies, histories, ethnographic descriptions, philosophical speculations, and anecdotal stories. The resulting mix of quantitative and qualitative descriptions and findings should be a delight for anyone with a sociological interest in Buddhism as it currently develops among nonimmigrant practitioners in the United States.

Difficulties in defining the subject of the study, what he calls the "New Buddhism," create the most important limitations in this otherwise fine work. Capitalizing on the "two Buddhisms" model first proposed by Charles Prebish and later extended by several other scholars, Coleman intends to study the "Western," "convert," or "elite" Buddhism of nonimmigrant practitioners rather than that of Asian immigrants. Further, despite the fact that "Soka Gakkai could well prove to be a gateway for Buddhism to reach a wider audience in the West" (p. 227), Coleman largely avoids discussing this practice, as for Coleman its lack of focus on meditation, material orientation, and proselytization make it too divergent to discuss with other forms.

While the Western convert/Asian immigrant "two Buddhisms" model does possess some heuristic value and enjoys much acceptance, several studies have revealed that the boundaries between the two groups are blurrier than this model supposes. Coleman chooses a sociologically interesting group for his focus, but in relying on this model as he does Coleman generally overlooks interactions across the supposed two Buddhisms which are also of great sociological interest. Also, by banishing Soka Gakkai from New Buddhism by definition, Coleman loses sociological richness, as the vast majority of these practitioners in America are non-

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immigrants and their tales reflect on those of other groups. These losses prevent me from describing this book as a comprehensive overview of Buddhism in America.

Coleman finds at the heart of his "New Buddhism" the quest for the "experience of the awakened state" (p. 5), making it continuous with Buddhist tradition all the way back to Shakyamuni Buddha. The overriding concern of the New Buddhism, like the old, is freedom from "greed, hatred, and delusion" (p. 12). Consequently, the most important reason Westerners become Buddhists in this study is because of the practice of meditation. People of course turn to alternate religions for a variety of reasons, but the literature on Buddhism in America needs more studies that explore this crucial reason as Coleman's does.

Likewise, with a chapter on "Sex, Power and Conflict," Coleman's study adds a valuable and sophisticated treatment of gender relations in American Buddhism. The survey and interview data lend academic rigor and depth to the study of the often-noted American feminization of Buddhism. The satisfying observation that the most important and enduring transformation Buddhism has undergone in its journey to the West is its greater empowerment of women concludes the fine analysis.

Also important to this treatment is the study of the attraction of a religious community as a reason for Westerners to become Buddhists. Coleman's data indicate that, contrary to some sociological theories, the search for a close-knit community amid the anomie of mass society is of only secondary importance to the Buddhists he studied. These data allow one some precision in sociologically differentiating Buddhism from other new religions in the West. One feels, however, that Coleman takes this point too far. Other, more psychodynamically oriented studies, such as those of Franz Metcalf and myself, suggest that hunger for community may play a deeper, if less consciously evident, role in the choice of religion than Coleman's experience-distant survey data may capture.

This book also contains excellent synopses of Buddhist history in both Asia and the West as well as descriptions of the theory and practice of many different individuals and schools. With its intelligent method, approachable style, wealth of data, and educated insights, this book remains an indispensable resource for and valuable addition to the study of the rapidly expanding practice of American Buddhism.

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PATTON, LAURIE L. *Myth as Argument: The Brhaddevatā as Canonical Commentary*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996. xxiii+549 pp. \$138.00 (cloth).

As its core, the Brhaddevatā (BD) is an index to the R̥gveda (RV), which identifies the deities to whom the hymns and verses of the RV are dedicated. It is far more than an index, however, for the bulk of the BD comprises narratives that explain the circumstances in which the various R̥gveda ṛ̥sis perceived the R̥gvedic *mantras*. In addition, the BD also includes a long introduction that classifies the R̥gvedic deities, discusses their names and natures, and examines issues of grammatical and lexical analysis. Patton's work is a study of the BD's religious functions, that is, its interpretation of the RV and its assertion of the power and authority of R̥gvedic *mantras*. This is very much a book that comes out of the discipline of religious studies, for it aims to make general observations about myth, canon, and hermeneutics. At the same time, it is also an Indological study, for it attempts to