



***Buddhist Modernities: Re-inventing Tradition  
in the Globalizing Modern World***

Edited by Hanna Havnevik, Ute Hüsken, Mark Teeuwen, Vladimir Tikhonov, and Koen Wellens. London and New York: Routledge 2017, 302 pages. ISBN 9781138687844 (hardcover), \$119.96; ISBN 9781315542140 (eBook).

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**T**his volume, edited by Hanna Havnevik, Ute Hüsken, Mark Teeuwen, Vladimir Tikhonov, and Koen Wellens, is the outcome of an international workshop convened at Oslo University in December 2013 to discuss the topic of Buddhist modernities. As stated in the introduction authored by Mark Teeuwen, this collective work builds on seminal contributions on this topic made by scholars such as Heinz Bechert, Donald Lopez, and David McMahan, and aims at exploring synchronically and diachronically the effects of the de-traditionalization and re-traditionalization of Buddhism in different cultural contexts, with particular attention to the variety/plurality of local responses to modernity (4). The volume is divided into four thematic sections, titled “Early Meetings with Modernity” (part one), “Revivals and Neo-Traditionalist Inventions” (part two), “Contemporary Sangha-State Relations” (part three), and “Institutional Modernity” (part four), respectively.

The opening chapter of part one is contributed by James Mark Shields, a scholar who has written extensively on Buddhist modernism in Japan. After a short introduction in which he engages critically with Donald Lopez’s characterizations of modern Buddhism, Shields examines the trajectory of the New Buddhist Fellowship, which was founded at the end of the nineteenth century. Shields presents this collective as the first “true” form of Buddhist modernism in Japan (17): the intellectuals who joined it were self-consciously modernist and emphasized the need for a Buddhism compatible with science, were critical of traditional Japanese Buddhism and “superstitions,” and lay-oriented. Perhaps even more significantly, Shields argues, they reinterpreted the traditional concept of “repaying debt” (*hōon*) in terms of social activism, also as a consequence of their encounter with socialist and anarchist ideas.

In the second chapter, Fabio Rambelli discusses the impact of capitalism on the thought of three modern Japanese intellectuals, Sada Kaiseki, Uchiyama Gudō, and Itō Shōshin. Sada criticized the forced modernization of the country promoted by the Meiji government but was not against progress as such, as is shown, for example, in his attempt to reconcile Western science with Buddhism through his commitment

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to the movement for the diffusion of Indic astronomy (*bonreki undō*). Uchiyama, who was implicated in the High Treason Incident and executed in 1911, provides an example of the interplay of Buddhism with anarchist and socialist ideas such as those concerning collective property and free education. Itō, after a brief encounter with the Japanese socialist movement in his youth, progressively moved toward rightist positions in wartime Japan. Despite their differences, for Rambelli these figures are truly modern, not the least because—despite not being linked to institutional Buddhism—they struggled to find a place for Buddhism in modern capitalistic Japan.

In his chapter on republican China, Justin Ritzinger illustrates the trajectory of Buddhism in that age of instability through “five pairs of contrasting terms” (51). The first of these, establishment and upstart, revolves around the intersection of religious institutions, charisma, and power. The second, religion and superstition, mainly refers to the attempt to shape a Buddhism compatible with modern science. The discussion on the third pair, nationalism and internationalism, is used by Ritzinger to show that loyalty to the state and a certain aspiration to universalism could actually coexist. By introducing the fourth pair, lay and monastic, he places emphasis on the emergence in this period of a distinct lay Buddhist identity, especially among the urban elites. Finally, Ritzinger discusses the this-worldly and other-worldly pair, and convincingly shows that these two concerns were significantly connected in the thought of various Chinese Buddhist modernists.

In the last chapter of part one, Hwansoo Kim takes his cue from the life and work of the monk Paek Yongsōng to explore Korean Buddhism at the time of Japanese colonialism. Kim counters “one-dimensional” interpretations of Paek as an uncompromising nationalist (67) by showing that his primary concern was to strengthen a modernized version of Imie Sōn (Ch. Linji Chan) Buddhism, and that in order to achieve his goal he was ready to work with the Japanese colonizers and incorporate elements from both Christianity and capitalism.

Part two of the volume opens with Valeriya Gazizova’s chapter on contemporary Buddhism in Kalmykia. Gazizova analyzes the religious revival in this autonomous republic within the Russian Federation since the late 1980s, with the reestablishment of the Kalmyk Buddhist lineage (belonging to the Tibetan Gelugpa tradition), the Central Monastery, and various attempts to revive monasticism and previous ties with Tibetan monasteries. She shows that while some of these activities are clear examples of re-traditionalization, they are accompanied by modernist tendencies (de-traditionalization) among Kalmyk Buddhist communities, such as the fact that their leaders are mostly non-celibate religious specialists promoting a non-sectarian approach.

Buddhist modernism in contemporary Mongolia is the topic of Hanna Havnevik’s chapter. Havnevik illustrates innovations within the Gelugpa tradition as consequences both of frequent visits by the Dalai Lama and Buddhist teachers (*geshes*) from Tibet, and of the creation of new centers, some of which are related to the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition. She also explores the activities of other Buddhist traditions in Mongolia, such as the Red Tradition (*ulaan shashin*), whose “self-taught clerics” incarnate the

claims of Mongol national identity and resistance to the dominance of the Gelugpa (121). And, at the intersection of Buddhism and new age religion, she discusses the activities of business temples and centers, such as the Mongol Aura and Energy Centre in Khailaast, which is run by a laywoman and offers various forms of healing/therapy and rituals such as those for summoning money.

The concluding chapter of this part is authored by Linda Gustavsson and focuses on Yumaism in Sikkim. This new religion combines elements of modernist Tibetan Buddhism with Hinduism, Christianity, and indigenous religious practices. Gustavsson notes that although Yumaism is not necessarily focused on the individual, it includes modernist elements such as a critical attitude toward the “authority of ritual specialists” and “superstition” (142).

The first chapter of part three addresses the theme of Buddhism in post-Mao China. Here, Koen Wellens argues that the secularist policies of the state could not eradicate the religiosity of the Chinese and their inclination to pluralism, and that these factors, together with the worshipping of Mao Zedong, opened the way to the “religious fever” of the 1980s (154). He also illustrates how a cautious support for Buddhism has been integrated by the Communist Party into its agenda for a harmonious society and the realization of the so-called China dream.

The next chapter focuses on South Korea with an account of the role played by Buddhist chaplains. Vladimir Tikhonov notes that, despite the liberalization of the religious market, the state grants certain privileges to Christianity (Protestant and Catholic) and Buddhism (traditional and Won) by allowing them to establish chaplaincy in what is the seventh largest army in the world. Since Buddhism is perceived as a symbol of Korean traditional culture, Tikhonov argues, this is also aimed at granting additional legitimation to the military service. In this process, however, emphasis on the masculine virtue of self-control found among chaplains indicates that a modernization and reinvention of Korean Buddhism is also taking place.

The trajectory of contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism is illustrated by Aike Rots in the next chapter. Rots notes that the Vietnamese state has recently changed its attitudes toward religion and allowed a certain revival of traditional practices. At the same time, as the emphasis on Zen and meditation over devotional Buddhism indicates, this revival is not independent from a generalized modernist pattern (188). Rots presents the activities of the well-known monk Thích Nhất Hạnh as an example of this trend, and explores the difficult relationships and tug of war between his movement and the Vietnamese state.

A final contribution to this part of the volume is given by Iselin Frydenlund with her chapter on the general theme of Buddhist pacifism. Similarly to other scholars, Frydenlund criticizes characterizations of Buddhism as a pacifist religion as the outcome of both orientalist approaches tracing back to the nineteenth century, and the “rationalization” of Buddhism in modern Asian countries (212).

Part four of this volume begins with Jessica Starling’s chapter on gender in Shin Buddhism, a major tradition of Japanese Buddhism. Starling follows in the footsteps of the German scholar Simone Heidegger, who has extensively explored this theme

in her seminal contributions and characterizes the Dōbōkai reform movement within Shin Buddhism (with its focus on the individual and subjectivity) and the Buraku Liberation League (with its focus on human rights) as the two major influences upon the development of Shin Buddhist feminism. Starling also questions the success of these ideas especially at the level of everyday practice within family temples.

The interplay of modernization and traditionalization in Theravāda female monasticism is explored in the chapter contributed by Ute Hüsken. The author illustrates the recent revival of the nuns' sangha through "mixed ordinations" based on the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya and its reality as both a "Western project" (i.e., promoted by Western nuns based on Western feminist theories) (244-45) and a modernist approach to Buddhism promoted by Asian Buddhists. Hüsken also underlines the progressively important role played in this process by Buddhist canonical texts, which were actually quite marginal in traditional monastic communities.

The work of Thích Nhất Hạnh also features in the chapter authored by Jens Borgland, who explores the monastic rules developed by the Vietnamese Buddhist leader and his religious community. Borgland argues that Hạnh's creation of an updated "Monastic Code for the Twenty-first Century" should be viewed within the broader context of historical adaptations to the Buddhist Vinaya (260). What really differentiates Hạnh's rules from other adaptations, Borgland notes, is the fact that they "take the form" of the Prātimokṣa and not that of local ordinances, a form that can also be interpreted as an attempt to strengthen the authority of this monastic code (268).

The concluding chapter is a contribution by Stuart Lachs on American Zen. Lachs takes his cue from the sex scandals revolving around the Zen Buddhist teacher Joshu Sasaki to argue that his Buddhism was "a transitional form" (290) between conservative and modern approaches. It was conservative, Lachs argues, especially because of his emphasis on hierarchy and secrecy, and modern because of his openness to laypeople and his stress on meditation.

This volume is a significant contribution to the debate on Buddhist modernism and its many strengths should be acknowledged. It is timely in that it addresses a topic that is becoming more and more relevant as well as addressing ongoing interdisciplinary discussions on multiple modernities. It is carefully edited. It presents examples of Buddhist modernism from a wide range of cultures (including the welcome contributions on Mongolia, Russia, and India) and is attentive to the way in which specifically Asian ideas have contributed to the creation of new religious forms. Most of the chapters are quite solid, with only a few of them still having the typical flavor of conference proceedings' papers or not engaging the theme of modernism clearly enough. A little more integration through comparisons and internal references between the different case studies and chapters would have probably given an added value to the volume, however, anyone who has participated in such a conference or edited a volume with this number of participants knows how difficult it is to reach this goal in a reasonable amount of time. It would also have been helpful to readers to make more explicit the difference between the first phase of modernism, starting in the nineteenth century, and contemporary forms of Buddhist modernism. But this would have probably required addressing the

topic of globalization and the difference between modernization and globalization, which is not the principal aim of this volume. All in all, this collection is a very welcome addition to the literature and I would highly recommend it to all those who are interested in Buddhism in modern and contemporary perspectives, Asian religions in general, and the interplay of religion with modern society.