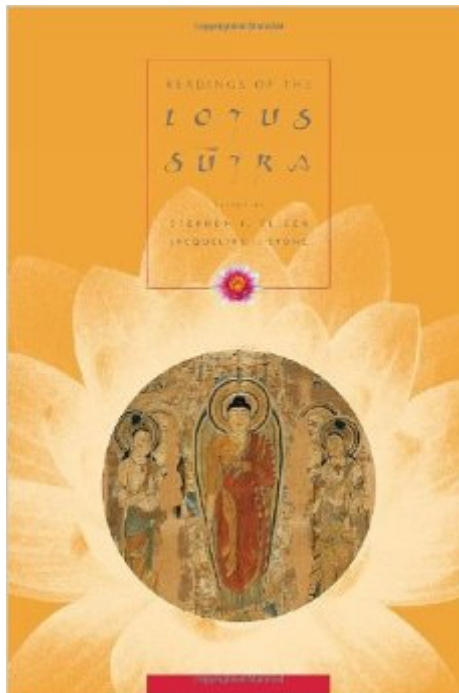


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Readings Of The Lotus Sutra (Columbia Readings Of Buddhist Literature)



Synopsis

The Lotus Sutra proclaims that a unitary intent underlies the diversity of Buddhist teachings and promises that all people without exception can achieve supreme awakening. Establishing the definitive guide to this profound text, specialists in Buddhist philosophy, art, and history of religion address the major ideas and controversies surrounding the Lotus Sutra and its manifestations in ritual performance, ascetic practice, visual representations, and social action across history. Essays survey the Indian context in which the sutra was produced, its compilation and translation history, and its influence across China and Japan, among many other issues. The volume also includes a Chinese and Japanese character glossary, notes on Western translations of the text, and a synoptic bibliography.

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Customer Reviews

Upon first approach, the Lotus Sutra may strike many as quite odd, especially if they are more familiar with Buddhism in the capacity of philosophy or with the original teachings of the Buddha from the Pali. It would be easy for such a person to simply abandon further research on this text if it were not for its extraordinary popularity in East Asian Buddhism. In order to gain insight in to the sutra's popularity, "...it is necessary to be familiar with not only the sutra text itself but also the stura's history of interpretation and the circumstances that have shaped that process over time." The closing lines of this collection of essays articulate exactly what they attempt to accomplish.

These eight essays unpack and contextualize the Lotus Sutra. For those interested in the sutra, especially those who are approaching it out of curiosity (as compared to those who approach it out of veneration), this is easily the best source available.1.) Interpreting the Lotus Sutra - Stephen F. Teiser & Jacqueline I. Stone This essay introduces the main themes of the sutra as an overview and looks into some of its unique aspects, such as its self-referential or circular quality. It also presents a valuable section on the history of the sutra's translation as well as an overview of the Lotus-centered schools of thought.2.) Expedient Devices, The One Vehicle, and the Life Span of the Buddha - Carl Bielefeldt This invaluable essay presents an easy and to the point explanation of the various sections of the Lotus Sutra, emphasizing skillful means (upaya).3.) Gender and Hierarchy in the Lotus Sutra - Jan Nattier This essay looks at Mahayana views on women around the time when the Lotus Sutra was written in Sanskrit. It also presents a great overview of gender issues within Buddhism. The famous story of the Naga princess who attains enlightenment in a matter of moments is addressed here and Nattier carefully pieces through the social forces of antiquity that influenced the notion that before she could be enlightened, she first had to turn into a man.4.) The Lotus Sutra and Self-Immolation - James A. Benn This essay looks at chapter 23 of the Lotus Sutra as the "locus classicus" of auto-cremation in Asia. This is exactly the sort of context that impressed me with this book. I'm sure many have wondered what setting oneself ablaze has to do with Buddhism, and I was surprised that this query was answered with "the Lotus Sutra, chapter 23 to be exact."5.) Buddhist Practice and the Lotus Sutra in China - Daniel B. Stevenson This essay expounds on the five practices of upholding, reading, reciting, explaining and copying the Lotus Sutra and how these have manifested in various practices in China.6.) Art of the Lotus Sutra - Willa Jane Tanabe This essay delivers a very dense crash-course in the varieties of art devoted to the Lotus Sutra. "This brief overview of art associated with the Lotus Sutra makes clear that East Asian Buddhists went far beyond the sutra's simple exhortation to draw images with fingernails and pile up sand stupas." Well there's an understatement.7.) Bodily Reading of the Lotus Sutra - Ruben L. F. Habito This essay addresses Nichiren's unique interpretation of the Lotus Sutra, which Habito breaks down into four major themes; reading the sutra is akin to meeting the Buddha, merely reciting the title will bestow enlightenment and protection, the sutra is very specifically necessary for Japan in its current era, and that true followers of the Sutra should reject all other schools and even lay down their lives for its true interpretation (which is, of course, Nichiren's).8.) Realizing this World as The Buddha Land - Jacqueline I. Stone This essay emphasizes the influence of the Lotus Sutra had on later doctrines of the non-duality between people and the Buddha Land and the Buddha Land and various aspects of this very world. She concludes with an insightful section on pre-war

Lotus Sutra-inspired nationalism in Nichiren-shugi (Nichirenism) and a brief post-war synopsis of Soka Gakkai and Rissho Koseikai. I found the investigation into Nichiren's "militant exclusionism" (Bowring) as a pre-war pre-cursor to Japanese ultra-nationalism to be utterly fascinating and would love to learn more. Overall, this collection of essays delivers sufficient context that will allow the reader to pull the Lotus Sutra out of mystery and place it in a very clear cultural, social and political setting. As I mentioned, this is easily the best book I know of that can accomplish this task. If there is one better suited to the job, I am unaware of it.

I bought it mostly for Jacqueline Stone's analysis of the Lotus, which is great. Some other stuff in it, such as about the art inspired by the Lotus Sutra, is not of particular interest to me, but I can appreciate it.

I've read several books about Buddhism, and it seems any book Jackie Stone has a hand in turns to gold. This volume is well written, well edited and provides a comprehensive view of the Lotus' history and influence. I recommend this reading to anyone who has more than a casual interest in the subject. The selection of articles reflects a thoughtful approach and deep understanding of this wonderful sutra.

As something of a devotee of the Lotus Sutra I welcome the careful scholarship on the text, history and lore on this great classic of Buddhism. Some of the pieces, however, were a bit dry and had the awkwardness of academic scholarship.

The authors are all top academics in the field. Their insights are a great help to those seeking to get a feeling of the Lotus Sutra in the world of Medieval Asia and Japan. I found this a great help in getting a better understanding. So little has been written in English, I applaud the editors and the publisher.

Everything came just on time and with great care, there was nothing wrong with the book, it looked just like new!

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