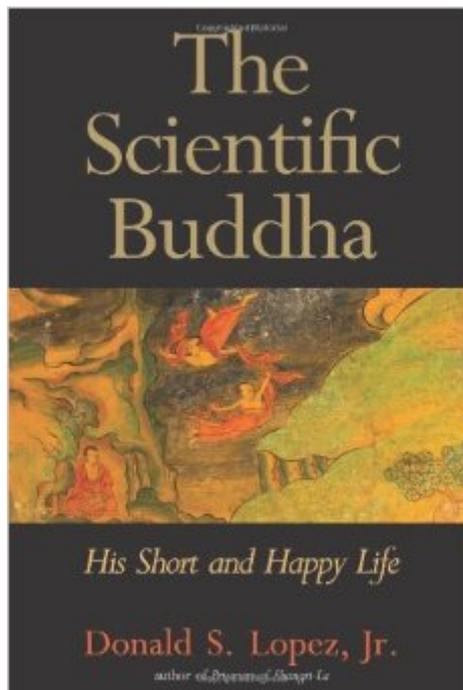


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The Scientific Buddha: His Short And Happy Life (The Terry Lectures Series)



Synopsis

This book tells the story of the Scientific Buddha, "born" in Europe in the 1800s but commonly confused with the Buddha born in India 2,500 years ago. The Scientific Buddha was sent into battle against Christian missionaries, who were proclaiming across Asia that Buddhism was a form of superstition. He proved the missionaries wrong, teaching a dharma that was in harmony with modern science. And his influence continues. Today his teaching of "mindfulness" is heralded as the cure for all manner of maladies, from depression to high blood pressure. In this potent critique, a well-known chronicler of the West's encounter with Buddhism demonstrates how the Scientific Buddha's teachings deviate in crucial ways from those of the far older Buddha of ancient India. Donald Lopez shows that the Western focus on the Scientific Buddha threatens to bleach Buddhism of its vibrancy, complexity, and power, even as the superficial focus on "mindfulness" turns Buddhism into merely the latest self-help movement. The Scientific Buddha has served his purpose, Lopez argues. It is now time for him to pass into nirvana. This is not to say, however, that the teachings of the ancient Buddha must be dismissed as mere cultural artifacts. They continue to present a potent challenge, even to our modern world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I believe in stating my own background and biases first. I have practiced Zen for nearly forty years under well-respected and traditional teachers. I am a research professor (nothing related to

Buddhism, but very familiar with academic pressures, politics, and promotion.) In my experience Buddhism and science are not identical; they have very different origins, motivations and ways of explaining matters. I share what I think is Lopez's concern about facile equation of science and religion (not only Buddhism). I recognize that Buddhism is very susceptible to one-with-everything assimilation of other traditions, not merely scientific ones. I would not like to see Buddhism reduced to a subset of mechanistic science, nor merely to stress-reduction techniques. In these opinions I believe I agree with Lopez (although it is often hard to tell; like many scholars, he obscures his own stance by citing sources.) Lopez (whom I'll refer to by initials, DSL) is clearly expert in the history of Buddhism; online indications are that he reads Tibetan and other primary languages. I can't document whether he actually practices meditation, but his writing has the feel of a celibate student of love poetry (and occasionally, of one who thinks he knows love better than the lovers). What is very clear is that DSL is a scholar, and takes that calling extremely seriously. Too seriously, I believe, to be well positioned to critique the scientific tradition, because his idea of scholarship is bound up in that tradition, especially its equation of documentation with Truth. Lopez writes (p. 78), "It is not the role of the scholar to protect, preserve, and defend the religion that he or she studies... It is the task of the scholar to document and analyze those efforts. Religions change over time.

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