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Buddhist Masculinities, edited by Megan Bryson and Kevin Buckelew. Columbia University Press, 2023. 252pp. Pb $35/£30, ISBN-13:9780231210478; HB $140/£117, ISBN-13: 9780231210461; e-book $34.99/£30, ISBN-13: 9780231558433.

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In the volume, *Buddhist Masculinities*, edited by Megan Bryson and Kevin Buckelew, the contributors provide a much-needed foray into the fields of Buddhism and gender studies by examining masculinity as it exists in text, practice, and interpretation. As Megan Bryson notes in the introduction to the volume, while men have been extensively studied in Buddhism, masculinity itself often goes "unnoticed and unmarked, which perpetuates its normative status" (7). Through shifting the lens away from those more often considered with regards to gender (i.e. women and those who are considered non-normative/non-binary/or trans*), the editors and contributors explore how masculinities are "constructed and contingent, rather than natural and inevitable." Such an effort challenges the notion of masculinity as being preeminent and the standard to which others are held, and reevaluates how we engage with masculinity as an ideal in Buddhist scholarship. I find the methodology of "hegemonic masculinity" throughout the volume particularly compelling, especially the positioning of masculinity as not only subordinating women and non-binary individuals but also as subordinating "other masculinities" (2). Through utilizing this framing, Bryson, Buckelew, and the contributors challenge us to reimagine how masculinity is constructed, operates, and informs our presuppositions around hierarchical assumptions of masculinity.

In engaging with the ways in which masculinities are constructed and subordinate one another, *Buddhist Masculinities* is split into four parts that engage with different aspects of this framing: Part 1, "Masculine Models" contains essays from Dessislava Vendova, Kevin Buckelew, and Stephen C. Berkwitz, and examines normative ideals of Buddhist masculinity. Part 2, "Mighty Masters," includes essays from Joshua Brallier Shelton, Rebecca Mendelson, and Bee Scherer and shifts from normative ideals to the concept of "masculine power" (11). Part 3, "Making Men," contains essays from Ward Keeler, Natawan Wongchalard, and Marcus Evans and demonstrates the influence of Buddhist ideals on positive masculinities and on being a "good man" (12). Part 4, "Breaking Boundaries," includes essays from Geng Song and Amy Paris Langenberg and focuses on differing ideals or conceptualizations of masculinity, aside from the normative concepts discussed in the first chapter. While due to the length of this review, I am unfortunately not able to review each essay, I'd like to highlight three key framings and arguments found

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throughout the volume that are especially prominent and impactful towards the goals of the volume.

The first key framing is demonstrated in Dessislava Vendova's essay, "Middle Way Masculinity" in which the author posits that the Buddha's physical body evolved throughout his lifetime "between the body of the perfect universal monarch and the body of the ideal ascetic" (41). Vendova also notes that the Buddha's physical characteristics mirrored his spiritual achievements, as while the Buddha as Prince Siddhārtha (on one hand) and during his time of extreme asceticism (on the other) demonstrated opposing ends on a scale of bodily form (and corresponding lack of spiritual attainment), the Buddha post-enlightenment represents his ideal if not perfect form in accord with spiritual achievement. Vendova also notes that "the Buddha's Middle Way masculinity encompasses and transcends these forms of masculinity while claiming its own hegemonic power," thereby establishing that the Buddha is both transcending established forms of masculinity (i.e. the ruler/monarch and the ascetic) while also establishing a unique and individualized form of masculinity (41). Vendova's essay begins the volume and establishes an excellent framing that demonstrates the complexities and contradictions within hegemonic masculinities.

Another essay that embodies similar ideas of complexity is "The Siddha Who Tamed Tibet" by Joshua Brallier Shelton, in which the author evaluates the masculinity of the "demon slayer" Padmasambhava in relation to the king Tri Songdétsen as they are depicted in Tibetan literature. Through the exegesis of the text, in which Padmasambhava conquers and converts the people of Tibet to Buddhism, Shelton negotiates mechanisms of masculinity and how they are created. As Shelton writes, "gender is a structural condition for this configuration of power, one that is brokered between men as *men*" (105). Here Shelton is drawing upon the idea discussed in the introduction to the volume, in which masculinity subordinates other masculinities, in this case through Padmasambhava's "tantric masculinity" which "displaces the king [Tri Songdétsen] from the top of the social hierarchy without challenging the institutional power of the king himself" (107). Shelton argues that hegemonic masculinity is negotiated through violence and humiliation, demonstrating how one form of masculinity usurps another to become dominant. I find Shelton's exposition of power in relation to violence to be an excellent methodology with bearings not only in textual study but in the present-day evaluation of social orders and hierarchies of power amongst Buddhist practitioners.

The final essay I would like to highlight is "Buddhism and Afro-Asian Masculinities in *The Man with the Iron Fists*" by Marcus Evans. In this essay, Evans evaluates the 2012 film, *The Man with the Iron Fists*," directed by RZA, to demonstrate how the appropriation of Buddhism is utilized to "[transform] the masculine self" (234). Through analyzing the role of the protagonist, Thaddeus, an emancipated American slave who flees to China, Evans illustrates the ways in which masculinity (in particular Black masculinity) is renegotiated through Chan Buddhist ideals. As Evans writes, "RZA not only appropriates Chan Buddhism into a masculinized understanding of himself and the world...he also invokes Chan Buddhist doctrines against racism while strengthening, refining, and sacralizing Black masculinity" (249).

Evans argues that RZA reimagines Black masculinity through the embodying of Chan Buddhist ideals and Asian martial arts in order to "triangulate them relative to a hegemonic form of Anglo-American manhood" (249). The embodying of Asian ideals is thus a response to a dominant form of white masculinity to counter the racist (and violent) ideals utilized against stereotyped and dominant forms of Black masculinity. Through the lens of the "counterhegemonic project of refashioning masculinity," Evans navigates masculinity as not only being negotiated within terms of male dominance but also within hierarchies of race, power, and violence (250). Such an argument posits further that masculinity is always existing in relation to another dominant form of masculinity, that it is created instead of existent. Evans' article is an excellent framing of the further negotiations of masculinity and how it can be informed and reimagined.

Though these brief evaluations are only a small portion of the chapters captured in *Buddhist Masculinities*, the work as a whole provides a new lens through which to evaluate ideas of masculinity. Tropes that were particularly beneficial include aforementioned ideas around violence, power, and hegemony, as well as further themes around contradiction, virtue, and heroism. The text's strongest aspect lies in its ability to provide a robust interpretative lens through which to understand masculinity as it relates to Buddhist hermeneutics, and to gauge and reevaluate the ways in which masculinities have been constructed throughout the study of Buddhist texts and traditions. Such a framework will be extremely beneficial in reevaluating conceptions of gender and how masculinity functions as a mechanism of power.

While I find *Buddhist Masculinities* to be an excellent foray into the area of Buddhist masculinity, there are two areas within which I would have liked to have seen additional exposition. Several authors discuss feminine men or femininity as its own form of masculinity, but there is very little exploration into conceptions of other forms of gender (aside from male/female binaries), as well as other identities along paradigms of sexual orientation or Queer identity/theory. Only Bee Scherer's article "Macho Buddhism (Redux)" addresses these identities, as other articles imagine masculinity within a fairly set positioning that does not at length engage with how masculinity interacts with gendered non-normativity. While I am mindful that this is an introductory exploration of masculinity in Buddhism, I would have also appreciated the casting of a slightly larger net in engaging with other substrata of gender and sexual orientation, particularly in relation to masculinized notions of power.

In a similar vein, and perhaps this is slightly too ambitious for the scope of the work, it would also have been beneficial to see how masculinity engages with power in the present day, particularly concerning abuse in *sanghas* and Buddhist communities, or the hyper-fixation on certain paradigms of masculinity by nationalist Buddhist monks and right-wing Western laypeople. Further explication on the *effects* of the masculinity that is conveyed and reinterpreted throughout the text would have allowed for a clearer understanding of how masculinity can be weaponized through Buddhist ideals to perpetuate harm. This is an area that requires additional study and would benefit from the praxis outlined in this volume.

Buddhist Masculinities is an excellent collection of essays that delves into conceptions of gender in ways that it is not traditionally explored or examined in Buddhist Studies. Such a work stands alone in this regard and provides a much-needed lens through which to reexamine our preexisting understanding of how masculinity has operated in Buddhist texts, practice, and interpretation. Such a work is incredibly beneficial and highlights the need for further scholarship in addressing preexisting frameworks of power, gender, and hierarchy.