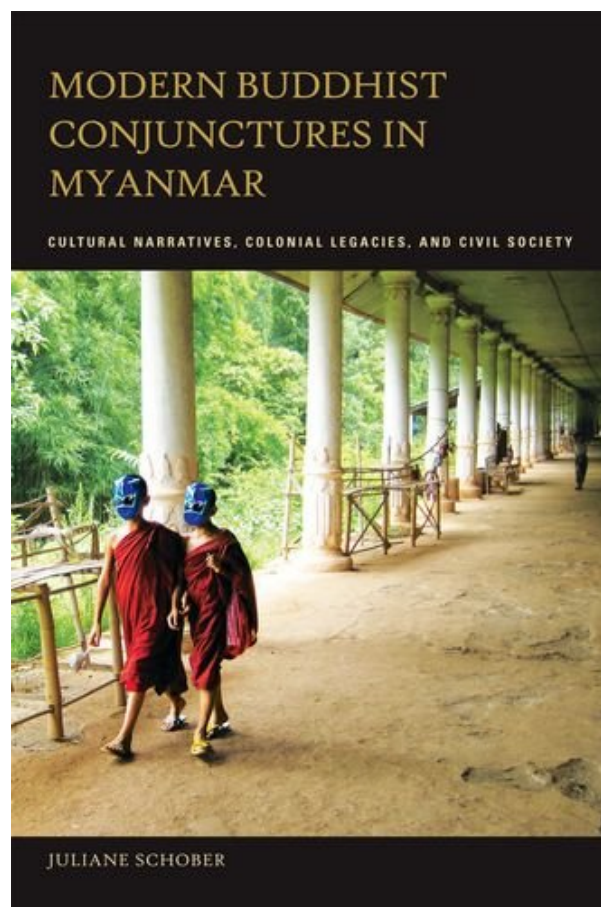


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Review

Schober's book brings the question of Buddhism and politics in Myanmar into perspective with thoughtful and welcome clarity. (Pacific Affairs)

A carefully-crafted call to remind us to critically analyze legacies of colonial scholarship and views of the world that continue to pervade our mindsets and tools of analysis. In her powerful book, Schober focuses on the intersection of religion and politics in Myanmar, and carefully traces their intertwined existence from pre-colonial times until today. (Asian Anthropology)

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Juliane Schober argues that Buddhist conceptions and practices are inevitably tied to conceptions of political power in social, economic, and political realms. In doing so she challenges as obsolete inherited categories of knowledge that define a normative view of Theravada Buddhism as otherworldly, nonpolitical, nonviolent, and 'protestantized.' **Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar** is essential reading for an understanding of the genealogies of hegemony and subjugation, patronage and resistance, and power and loss in contemporary Myanmar, and makes an important contribution to our understanding of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. (Donald Swearer, Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University)|Juliane Schober's greatest strength is her intimate knowledge of the modern Burmese social and political context within which Buddhism has been transformed. For those who hope to understand the relationship between Buddhism and politics in Burma, especially the issues behind the spectacular events of September 2007, this book will be the premier source for garnering the necessary background. She has not only synthesized and distilled a diverse cross-section of sources generated from a variety of cultural origins and academic disciplines, but she has written in a conceptually accessible manner. She has also been quite adept in depicting the manner in which Buddhism functioned as a legitimating ideology within pre-colonial Burmese contexts of Buddhist kingship. (John Clifford Holt, William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of the Humanities in Religion & Asian Studies, Bowdoin College)|In this engagingly written book, Juliane Schober

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For centuries, Burmese have looked to the authority of their religious tradition, Theravada Buddhism, to negotiate social and political hierarchies. *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar* examines those moments in the modern history of this Southeast Asian country when religion, culture, and politics converge to chart new directions. Arguing against Max Weber's characterization of Buddhism as other-worldly and divorced from politics, this study shows that Buddhist practice necessitates public validation within an economy of merit in which moral action earns future rewards. The intervention of colonial modernity in traditional Burmese Buddhist worldviews has created conjunctures at which public concerns critical to the nation's future are reinterpreted in light of a Buddhist paradigm of power.

Author Juliane Schober begins by focusing on the public role of Buddhist practice and the ways in which precolonial Buddhist hegemonies were negotiated. Her discussion then traces the emergence of modern Buddhist communities through the colonial experience: the disruption of traditional paradigms of hegemony and governance, the introduction of new and secular venues to power, modern concerns like nationalism, education, the public place of religion, the power of the state, and Buddhist resistance to the center. The continuing discourse and cultural negotiation of these themes draw Buddhist communities into political arenas, either to legitimate political power or to resist it on moral grounds. The book concludes with an examination of the way in which Buddhist resistance in 2007, known in the West as the Saffron Revolution, was subjugated by military secularism and the transnational pressures of a global economy.

A skillfully crafted work of scholarship, *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar* will be welcomed by students of Theravada Buddhism and Burma/Myanmar, readers of anthropology, history of religions, politics, and colonial studies of modern Southeast Asia, and scholars of religious and political practice in modern national contexts.

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A study of Buddhism and politics

By Arnold

Juliane Schober takes aim at the traditional Weberian depiction of Buddhism as an "otherworldly" religion. The book is essentially a recapitulation of Burmese history with a focus on Buddhist politics. She categorizes the role of Buddhist monks and ideology in Burma's various political debates. She's particularly insightful in trying to sort through the internal politics of the sangha, such as the tensions between the older and younger monks. The only improvement I would have suggested is a brief comparative section, comparing Burma's Buddhist politics with those of other Buddhist countries.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Is crossing swords with an old tome of 1916 worth doing?

By Harvy Lind

This thin monograph of six chapters or 150 pages (plus another fifty pages of end matter) offers the unremarkable thesis that Theravada Buddhist organizations and individuals have played a major role in Myanmar politics and society, including in opposition movements such as the late 1980s protests against the ruling military junta. In a country where something like 90% of the population is Theravada Buddhist, this is exactly what one would expect. The author sets up a sort of straw dog in taking issue with Max Weber's 1916 study of Hinduism and Buddhism, referring in the bibliography merely to the book's 1958 English translation and omitting the fact that Weber published it in 1916. Weber's book was an early sociological study that has been superseded in the several decades that have passed since its publication, so Schober's preoccupation with setting herself apart from Weber seems anachronistic. Although Weber did use the term "otherworldly" to characterize aspects of Hindu and Buddhist thought that lead some religious practitioners to separate themselves from the family and society as much as possible, he also acknowledged that these religions have also been intertwined with the societies in which they have been practiced, and thus have been functional and influential in society and politics. One could point to the example of the Mauryan king Ashoka, who converted to Buddhism and worked hard to spread the faith not only within India but also abroad. So the notion that Schober is somehow freeing us readers from the image of a politically passive and nonviolent Buddhist culture in Myanmar and elsewhere in the region is sorely mistaken.

There are other problems with this study. The book's emphasis on the Buddhist majority also tends to obscure the significance of non-Buddhist minorities in Burmese border regions. Moreover, the book's contention that two more generations will be needed for Myanmar's "postcolonial project" to unfold has been overtaken by rapid movement in the direction of more political liberalization in recent years, as Aung San's legalized secular political party has emerged as a more powerful political force than the Buddhist organizations in which Schober has put so much stock.

Overall, this book was conceptually disappointing and mediocre.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

For understanding religion-political identities in Myanmar, a must!

By daniel murphree

As someone who has worked closely with self-identified religious/political refugees from Myanmar and who is studying the subject at an academic level, Dr. Juliane Schober deals with the complexities of identity, historical, anthropological, religious tradition, political issues with finesse. My only critique was the level of waxing over political figure Aung San Suu Kyi, who is the darling of Liberal democratic movements. Her position on religious minorities remains to be seen. Also more might have been said regarding patron-client relationships in the delta region mentioned by Taylor in his work(s) on Myanmar. However, if there is anyone studying Myanmar political issues and they ignore this scholarship on religious makeup of the ethnic majority, their work is sure to come up short. Easy to read. Well sourced. Credibly published.

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