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## **The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent (Religion in North America)**

*Thomas A. Tweed*

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**Thomas A. Tweed : The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent (Religion in North America)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent (Religion in North America):

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Good resource for history buffsBy UnknownI really enjoyed this great book. Provides interesting resources and history on the development of Buddhism in the United States9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. An insightful study of Victorian American BuddhismBy Kim BoykinThis historical and sociological study of Buddhism in the U.S. from 1844 to 1912 provides insight not only into American Buddhism but also into American culture in the Victorian period and the interactions between new religious movements and the values and beliefs of the dominant culture. The book is academic but not obtuse, and it's relatively engaging.Tweed explores in detail the ways in which European-American converts to and sympathizers with Buddhism in the Victorian period both dissented from the dominant culture and also consented to it, and he observes that to be successful, a new or transplanted religious movement needs to be different but not too different from the dominant culture. Tweed argues that Buddhist adherents and sympathizers shared a number of basic Victorian

American values and beliefs that Buddhism, as it was then understood, seemed to contradict: theism; individualism (a label that Tweed actually uses for two distinct things: the belief in a substantial and immortal self and an emphasis on self-reliance); optimism (a belief in the basic goodness and inevitable progress of individuals and history); and activism (an emphasis on moral action to uplift individuals and reform societies). In contrast, Buddhism was seen as atheistic, nihilistic, pessimistic, and passive. Although some Americans attracted to Buddhism were able to reject theism and the belief in a substantial self, very few were able to relinquish their commitments to optimism and activism, and they rejected interpretations of Buddhism as pessimistic and passive. Tweed finds that two major sources of Buddhism's appeal during the Victorian period were the perception that Buddhism was more compatible than Christianity with science and the perception that Buddhism was more tolerant than Christianity and Victorian culture toward religious and cultural outsiders. Tweed also provides an interesting typology of Euro-American Buddhist adherents and sympathizers in Victorian America: the "esoteric," "rationalist," and "romantic" types. Also recommended: "Buddhism in America" by Richard Hughes Seager.

This book focuses on the nineteenth-century debate in America about the nature and value of Buddhism. Thomas A. Tweed examines the impact of Buddhism and shows what happened when a new and transplanted religious movement came into contact with an established and significantly different tradition. The debate about Buddhism highlights the fundamental beliefs and values of Victorian American culture and illuminates the cultural constraints on religious dissent. The Americans who encountered Buddhism included critics, scholars, travelers, and converts from many social classes across the United States. Although many of the Buddhist sympathizers and adherents considered themselves dissenters from Victorian America, Tweed shows that in important ways they were cultural 'consenters.' While they were willing, in their embrace of Buddhism, to discard ideas at the heart of traditional Western religion, they shared with their critics other values which they did not abandon. The story of their attempt to reconcile Buddhism with those values and to make Buddhism consonant in some measure with the dominant culture provides rich insights into the world of Victorian America.

"This is one of the finest books I have read in a long time. (William H. Swatos, Jr., "Sociology of Religion")"Indispensable reading for anyone interested in the history of Buddhism in America. (Jan Nattier, Indiana University)"An important and original contribution to American intellectual and social history. (Robert S. Ellwood, ("Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography"))"This book is an important contribution to the sometime rancorous debate about what American Buddhism ought to look like and how it can best be adapted to American culture in ways that will insure both its success in the future and its integrity. (Richard Hughes Seager, Hamilton College)"This is one of the finest books I have read in a long time. (William H. Swatos, Jr., "Sociology of Religion")Indispensable reading for anyone interested in the history of Buddhism in America. (Jan Nattier, Indiana University)An important and original contribution to American intellectual and social history. (Robert S. Ellwood, ("Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography"))This book is an important contribution to the sometime rancorous debate about what American Buddhism ought to look like and how it can best be adapted to American culture in ways that will insure both its success in the future and its integrity. (Richard Hughes Seager, Hamilton College) This is one of the finest books I have read in a long time. . . . I find the account particularly worthwhile for its sensitivity to how the American Buddhists and their Asian allies worked to shape their account of Buddhism to address the core value concerns of Victorian America. . . . I highly recommend it.--William H. Swatos, Jr., Sociology of ReligionIndispensable reading for anyone interested in the history of Buddhism in America.--Jan Nattier, Indiana UniversityWhen first published, Tweed's *American Encounter with Buddhism* raised questions about how Buddhism could be assimilated to American ideals and values. Its republication has a timeliness now that the dharma has taken on far greater prominence in the 'new pluralism' of the nation's religious landscape. This book is an important contribution to the sometime rancorous debate about what American Buddhism ought to look like and how it can best be adapted to American culture in ways that will insure both its success in the future and its integrity.--Richard Hughes Seager, author of *Buddhism in America* An important and original contribution to American intellectual and social history. . . . After reading [it], one is not likely ever again to think of America in quite the same way as before. . . . Highly recommended.--Robert S. Ellwood, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*This paperback reprint of the highly acclaimed 1992 hardback is welcome, enabling it to become even more widely accessible to scholars and students. . . . Details and examples are combined with discussion of broader trends in a masterful synthesis.--*Journal of American Studies*From the Inside FlapOriginally published in 1992, this landmark study on "convert Buddhism" in Victorian America is a fascinating cultural history that explores the ways Buddhism was adopted and understood by a variety of Americans including intellectuals, travellers, and critics. This new edition has a preface that places the book in the context of Buddhism's growing influence in American culture today.