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Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society

Juliane Schober

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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 explores rival visions of Buddhism, politics, and society in contemporary Myanmar. Highlighting the deep fissures in Burmese society, she shows how in certain periods nationalism, secular power, and religious identity have interacted so as to open up new moral and political possibilities while foreclosing others. Far ranging in its coverage but ethnographically rich, this book is a must read for all students of Southeast Asian Buddhism and politics." --Robert W. Hefner, Director of the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs, Boston University

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.

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