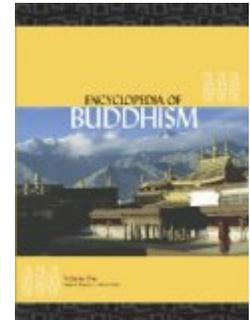


Robert Jr.. Buswell, ed.. *The Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003. xxxix + 981 pp. \$265.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-02-865718-9.



Reviewed by Jeffrey Samuels

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Reviews of reference works are quite challenging. As different standards must be used to evaluate reference works than scholarly monographs, the following review of the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* will be limited to several of the points suggested in Charles Muller's review of John Powers's *A Concise Encyclopedia of Buddhism*: extensiveness of coverage, balance, accessibility, and organization.[1] Before reviewing the *Encyclopedia* in terms of these rubrics, a brief overview of this reference work may be helpful.

The *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* is the second encyclopedia of Buddhism to be published in the last four years. Unlike John Powers's concise encyclopedia (which covers 900 entries in 256 pages), the Editor-in-Chief and the Editorial Board of the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* attempted to do much less (approximately 470 entries) in much greater detail (almost 930 pages). As a reference source that seeks to locate Buddhist beliefs, art, architecture, and practices within their broader cultural and historical contexts, The *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* is one of the most valuable reference

sources for the study of the Buddhist tradition published to date.

The intended audience of this publication includes college undergraduates, high school teachers and students, public library patrons, and journalists; however, the range and depth of material covered in the *Encyclopedia* (e.g., texts, people, schools, major doctrines, practices, liturgy, and so on) make it not only valuable to graduate students, but even to specialists in the fields of Asian and Buddhist studies. Its many photographs, illustrations, color inserts, and bibliographies as well as its catalogue of Buddhist art and other forms of material culture provide the reader with more than a simple encounter with the tradition.

A. Extensiveness of Coverage and Balance

Although there are only 470 entries, the extent to which most entries are dealt with is commendable. While one might expect, as Muller also suggests, that reference works oftentimes have their foundation in a body of information that is closely aligned with the research interests of the principal author or the Editor-in-Chief (which, in this case, is Korea), the *Encyclopedia* has fortu-

nately avoided this shortcoming by bringing in an editorial board whose research interests cover a truly wide range.[2] Indeed, a close analysis of the list of entries point to an encyclopedia that is very balanced in terms of Buddhist schools, concepts, movements, geographical areas, and historical periods.

As Robert Buswell acknowledges in the preface, the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* makes no pretense of comprehensiveness. Instead of attempting "a comprehensive survey of major topics in each principal Asian tradition" (p. vii), the editors decided to concentrate their effort on how major topics, doctrines, personages, rituals, and so on cut across cultural and historical boundaries. While it may be true that some of the entries have not entirely accomplished this goal (e.g., the entry on "bodhisattva" treats the concept almost exclusively from a Mahaayaana perspective and, thus, fails to locate it in some non-Mahaayaana Buddhist schools and texts), the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* does a superb job at covering a wide range of topics that are pertinent to Buddhism's diverse regional and historical manifestations. Moreover, by focusing on such topics as abortion, euthanasia, economics, engaged Buddhism, homosexuality, pacifism, and Buddhism and politics, the *Encyclopedia* does an excellent job in realizing its objective of covering topics that are emphasized "in the contemporary field of Buddhist studies" (p. viii).

B. Accessibility and Organization

While specialists would find the *Encyclopedia* to be a reliable reference source, one does not have to be a scholar of Buddhism or Asian studies to access it. There is a very useful index in volume two and a synoptic outline of entries in volume one. The latter, which draws connections between diverse entries, is particularly helpful to those less familiar with how certain concepts may relate to one another. The inclusion of short bibliographies after each entry provides the user with the tools necessary for further research and exploration,

though not all bibliographies include more recent publications.

One issue that arises in most reference works that deal with multiple cultural and historical contexts is the language in which the entries are listed. As noted in the preface, pan-Buddhist terms common to most Buddhist traditions are written according to their Sanskrit spelling. Even though such uniformity is vitally important to any reference work, including alternate language spelling of more common words in the index (e.g., Amida in addition to Amitaabha and *dukkha* in addition to *du.hkha*) would, perhaps, make the *Encyclopedia* even more user-friendly, especially to those who might be unaware of Sanskrit or of alternate spellings.

Conclusion

The bringing together of over two hundred scholars and specialists in the field of Buddhist studies has resulted in an encyclopedia that contains a plethora of articles that are both accurate and timely. Furthermore, the inclusion of entries that are pertinent to the wider discipline of religious studies (such as evil, conversion, and sacred space) as well as the very useful appendices that provide timelines of the tradition in its diverse geographical locations make the *Encyclopedia* an invaluable reference source for a wide audience. As a work that treats and does justice to a broad range of Buddhist thoughts, practices, and cultures, the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* is the best reference source on the Buddhist traditions available today.

Notes

[1]. Charles Muller, "Three New Buddhist Reference Works," *H-Net Reviews in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (July 2003): p. 1. <<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=62131064888439>>

[2]. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-buddhism>

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