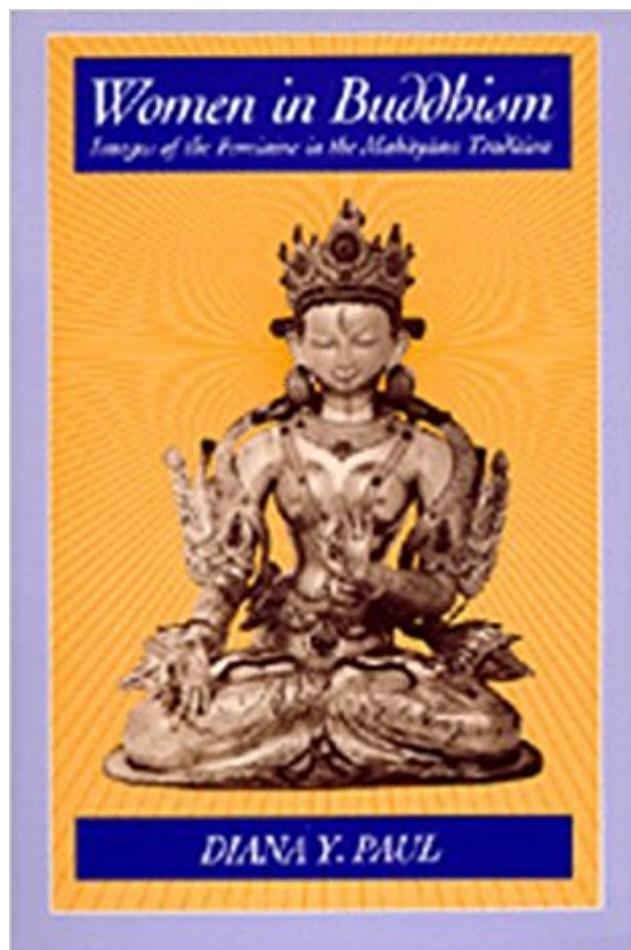


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# Women In Buddhism: Images Of The Feminine In The Mahayana Tradition



## Synopsis

"In seeking to explore the interrelationships between, and mutual influence of, varieties of sexual stereotypes and religious views of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, *Women in Buddhism* succeeds in drawing our attention to matters of philosophical importance. Paul examines the 'image' of women which arise in a number of Buddhist texts associated with Mahayana and finds that, while ideally the tradition purports to be egalitarian, in actual practice it often betrayed a strong misogynist prejudice. Sanskrit and Chinese texts are organized by theme and type, progressing from those which treat the traditionally orthodox and negative to those which set forth a positive consideration of soteriological paths for women. . . . In *Women in Buddhism*, Diana Paul may be forcing our consideration of the problem of female enlightenment. Thus the main purport and accomplishment of her scholarship is revolutionary."<sup>1</sup>Philosophy East and West

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is, p. xii, "an attempt to document a range of problems concerning the depiction of women & her feminine nature in Mahayana literature." It covers the 2nd to 6th c. CE, following Horner's "Women Under Primitive Buddhism" which addressed 1st c. CE Theravada Buddhism. Thus, it has become a classic work. It presents texts in 3 Parts "progressing from the most negative images of the feminine to the most positive." Within each Part, each chapter has a chapter introduction, excerpt introductions, & selected excerpts, 19 in all (16 are sutras, 9 are translated for the 1st time). Tantric Buddhism is excluded but mentioned a few times. The best parts IMHO are Paul's general

introduction & conclusion. She gives pithy, generic, but undocumented comments on Mahayana sutras, providing context for the work: pp. xxii-xxiv: "The sutras developed over 100's of years in different regions & by different authors...the sutras are not dated & the authorship is unknown...some of the sutras were originally folktales or myths...they developed over a long time, with continuous emendations & accretions...many of the texts no doubt have incorporated what were originally non-Buddhist ideas & attitudes...textual materials may represent only orthodoxy & not the common tradition of lay Buddhist practitioners"--yet their acceptance as scripture indicates their acceptance in principle. Her main thesis is that, p. 309: "the tension between sexual prejudice & religious ideals was reflected throughout Buddhist literature." While, p. 3: "Buddhist literature implies that woman is biologically determined to be sexually uncontrollable...the 'eternal feminine' as temptress & seductress is a common element in religious thought," antithetically, p.

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