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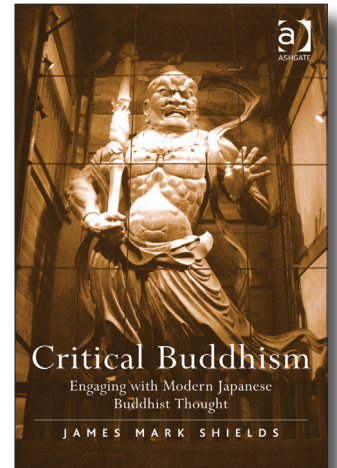
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Critical Buddhism

Engaging with Modern Japanese Buddhist Thought

James Mark Shields, Bucknell University



In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the relative calm world of Japanese Buddhist scholarship was thrown into chaos with the publication of several works by Buddhist scholars Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shiro, dedicated to the promotion of something they called Critical Buddhism (hihan bukkyo). In their quest to re-establish a “true”—rational, ethical and humanist—form of East Asian Buddhism, the Critical Buddhists undertook a radical deconstruction of historical and contemporary East Asian Buddhism, particularly Zen.

While their controversial work has received some attention in English-language scholarship, this is the first book-length treatment of Critical Buddhism as both a philosophical and religious movement, where the lines between scholarship and practice blur. Providing a critical and constructive analysis of Critical Buddhism, particularly the epistemological categories of critica and topica, this book examines contemporary theories of knowledge and ethics in order to situate Critical Buddhism within modern Japanese and Buddhist thought as well as in relation to current trends in contemporary Western thought.

Contents: Introduction; Buddhism, criticism and postwar Japan; The roots of ‘topicalism’; Problems in modern Zen thought; Criticism as anamnesis; Radical contingency and compassion; Bibliography; Index.

“James Mark Shields has succeeded in presenting clearly a complex and little-known Japanese philosophico-political current and in analyzing its historical implications.”

—Bernard Bernier, Université de Montréal

“A valuable appraisal and critique of the Critical Buddhism movement. This book will be of interest to anyone with an interest in contemporary Zen and Japanese thought.”

—Damien Keown, Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK

“Anyone interested in Buddhism, philosophy or comparative religious ethics will relish this important book. Shields accomplishes what he takes as his goal in writing this rich and incisive book: initiating a ‘second wave’ of Critical Buddhism. After analyzing how Critical Buddhists reject ‘topicalism’ in Japanese Buddhism and advocate ‘criticalism,’ Shields explores the ethical issues on which they have focused and then draws skillfully on Levinas, Gadamer, Rorty and other philosophers to expand and reposition Critical Buddhism.”

—Christopher Ives, Stonehill College

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