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*A Review of Presenting Japanese
Buddhism to the West: Orientalism,
Occidentalism, and the Columbian
Exposition*

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Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition. By Judith Snodgrass. London and Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. 351 pages. ISBN: 0-8078-5458-1 (paperback); 0-8078-2785-1 (cloth)

A reworking of Snodgrass's 1994 doctrinal dissertation for the University of Sydney, this book is a valuable addition to the growing literature concerning both Buddhist historiography and religion in the World's Fair of 1893. Focusing upon Japanese Buddhist presentations at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, Snodgrass's unique contribution is to examine the manner in which Buddhist leaders self-consciously portrayed Buddhism to a Western audience. Her underlying argument is that Orientalism is a two-sided process involving both Western and Japanese agency. By concentrating on Japanese delegates, she describes how they both attempted to fit Buddhism into the Western preconceptions implicit in the parliament and also how they used the event as part of domestic strategies to benefit Buddhism at home.

Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West begins by placing Japan's participation in the World's Fair in the larger context of international treaty revision. In the first chapter, Snodgrass demonstrates that attendance at this exposition was a crucial expression of Japanese foreign policy aimed at convincing the international public that Japan was a "civilized" country, which was necessary if international trade treaties were to be revised. Toward this aim, Snodgrass concentrates largely upon the planning and reception of the Hōōden (Phoenix Pavilion), an exhibition of Japanese art and architecture. By looking at both Japanese and Western agency, she presents a convincing analysis of the Hōōden's presentation as an intelligent

and strategic appropriation of Western categories to showcase indigenous Japanese cultural products.

The second through fourth chapters examine the World's Parliament of Religions within the larger context of the Chicago exposition. Snodgrass is at her most convincing here when she demonstrates the Christian motivations behind what appeared to be an activity engineered toward world religious pluralism. By analyzing the contents of the delegates' presentations and the publications of the conference's organizers, Snodgrass shows that despite rhetoric of tolerance, there were rules in place designed to assert the authority of Christian participants. These rules existed because the conference was inspired by an active attempt at Christian missionary outreach. Snodgrass goes on in the fourth chapter to discuss the place of Buddhism in the World's Parliament of Religions and then more broadly to analyze Buddhism's role as an inversion of Christianity (or in Snodgrass's terminology "Buddhism as the 'Other' of Christianity") in the nineteenth-century West more broadly. This section is particularly interesting as many of the period's mistaken presuppositions about Buddhism continue to appear today in popular images of the religion.

The following two chapters provide a brief survey of Japanese Meiji Buddhism leading up to the World's Fair. Focusing initially upon Japanese New Buddhism (*shin bukkō*), she argues that the anti-Buddhist movements of the mid-nineteenth century had precipitated the development of a new form of Buddhism that had already embraced the West as a "measure and model of the modern." (136) Thus, this New Buddhism was already well prepared for the Parliament of Religions and potential import to the West. In Chapter 6, Snodgrass concentrates upon Inoue Enryō (1858-1919) one of the most influential Buddhist scholars of the Meiji period. In discussing Inoue's strategic deployment of Western philosophy to lend authority to his vision of Buddhism, Snodgrass argues that Western categories are not so much essential to Inoue's thinking as they are used rhetorically to add weight to his own attempts to promote Buddhism.

Chapters 7, 10, and 11 all continue this theme to some degree in their examination of Japanese strategic "deployment of Western authority." The first of these chapters describes Theosophical Society president Henry Steel Olcott and his tour of Japan in 1889. Snodgrass demonstrates that Japanese Buddhist leaders had little interest in Olcott's understanding of Buddhist doctrine, but instead they used his presence as a famous pro-Buddhist Westerner to consolidate popular support. In chapters 10 and 11, Snodgrass takes up the case of philosopher and popular author Paul Carus and his famous *Gospel of the Buddha*. Examining the context of the composition of this work in the aftermath of the World's Fair, Snodgrass shows that Carus's Gospel was an archetypal example of Orientalism in its appropriation of Eastern religious symbols to support underlying Western conceptions. This is

a good case for the book's larger argument in that Snodgrass effectively demonstrates the influence of the Japanese delegates upon Carus and his repackaging of Christian monism in a Buddhist framework. Chapter 11 looks at the translation of Carus's Gospel into Japanese. In this case as well, the weight of Western authority can be seen less in the influence of its ideas than in its strategic value for Buddhist nationalist movements.

The heart of Snodgrass's argument can be found in chapters 8 and 9, where she makes a convincing case for the two-sided Orientalism that is the focus of her work. By examining in detail the presentations (and accompanying literature) of the Japanese delegates to the World's Parliament of Religions, Snodgrass demonstrates that they were aware of Western perceptions of Buddhism and interested in creating a special place for Japanese Buddhism within Western discourse. They were motivated to produce this image of Buddhism both to benefit the status of Buddhism at home, and because they understood that portraying Japanese Buddhism as a "civilized" religion could contribute to the revision of unequal international trade treaties. Toward this end the delegates directly addressed Western critiques of Buddhism by selectively interpreting the Japanese tradition. For example, Hirai Kinzō, a lay Buddhist delegate, responded to charges that Buddhism was an atheistic and idolatrous religion by identifying God with the ultimate truth of Mahayana Buddhism. Explaining the white paper strips (*gohei*) found in Shinto shrines as representations of "the purity and immutability of universal truth or reason," (187) Hirai argued that the Japanese attitude toward religious images was not idolatrous worship, but instead an attempt to reach abstract truths through visual aids. Similarly other Buddhists portrayed the Nirvana Sutra as consistent with "mental science and biology" (211) or Mahayana Buddhism as being compatible (if not directly preaching) the existence of an immortal soul. (220) In these cases, as well as many others, Snodgrass shows great acumen in providing examples of intentional modifications of Buddhist doctrine to appeal to a Western audience.

Overall, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West* admirably argues Snodgrass's thesis. It succeeds in demonstrating Japanese agency in the Orientalism of the World's Parliament of Religions, and shows how strategic Occidentalism was manifest in Japanese attempts to use Western authority for the promotion of local causes and ideas. Nevertheless, while reading the book I was struck by a strange absence of Japanese secondary (and in many cases primary) materials. This is most clear where the book works less well, e.g., in its presentation of Inoue Enryō and the historical context of Meiji Buddhism. The fifth chapter, with its narrative about the origins of the New Buddhism movement, could have been significantly nuanced with either primary source evidence or knowledge of standard secondary works on the subject such as Ikeda Eishun's *Meiji no shin bukkyō undō*. Thus, although the book claims to explain the domestic factors that shaped the presentations of the

Buddhist delegates, it does not fully succeed in doing so. The chapter on Inoue is even more problematic because (with one exception) Snodgrass refers to only one of his many published works (*Bukkyō katsuuron joron*) and there only to the sections of that work which she finds in Kathleen Staggs's English translation. By looking at just the introduction to one book (even the most famous), Snodgrass distorts the picture of Inoue by ignoring the bulk of his writings, which do more than 'strategically deploy' Western authority but rather show the deep influence of philosophy on his thought. In general, when the bibliography and footnotes are perused more thoroughly it becomes clear that Snodgrass's book makes little use of Japanese language secondary literature in any section; even Japanese primary literature is fairly slim (A quick survey of the bibliography for Japanese language materials reveals five general reference works, eight primary sources and only four Japanese language secondary sources for the entire book). This scarcity of Japanese language materials is especially ironic in a book about Orientalism.

Regardless, this is only a small criticism, if we read *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West* as a discussion of representations of Buddhism brought to a Western setting, it works quite well. Rich detail and Snodgrass's fascinating analysis of the World's Parliament of Religions alone make this book worthwhile. I would heartily recommend it for those interested in Orientalism or Japanese agency in the images of Western Buddhism. However, it should not be read by itself as a history of significant events in nineteenth-century Japanese Buddhism.