Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations
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Abstract

This book offers a general overview of Mahayana Buddhism from historical and doctrinal perspectives. It lays a foundation for Mahayana doctrines in 10 chapters and covers a sufficient range of topics on Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan Buddhism. It also provides a basis for further research on Mahayana Buddhism. Williams starts by introducing the historical background of Mahayana Buddhism. Then, he elaborates upon central themes in Mahayana philosophy, such as Prajñāpāramitā, Mādhyamika, Yogācāra, et cetera. Finally, he elucidates Mahayana soteriological and devotional praxis.

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Mahayana Buddhism spread across Asia, becoming the prevalent form of Buddhism in Tibet and East Asia. Over the last twenty-five years Western interest in Mahayana has increased considerably, reflected both in the quantity of scholarly material produced and in the attraction of Westerners towards Tibetan Buddhism and Zen. Paul Williams' Mahayana Buddhism is widely regarded as the standard introduction to the field, used internationally for teaching and research and has been translated into several European and Asian languages. This new edition Mahayana Buddhism: the doctrinal foundations / Paul Williams. — 2nd ed. p. cm. — (The library of religious beliefs and practices). The importance of appreciating doctrinal diversity applies not just to Buddhism as a whole but to the Mahayana itself. There is a fallacy which I shall call the 'essentialist fallacy'. It occurs when we take a single name or naming expression and assume that it must refer to one unified phenomenon. Indeed, it has become a foundational text for courses on Mahayana Buddhism at the university level, and since almost two decades of burgeoning scholarship in the field had passed, a second edition was considered necessary. I can say this much: it is quite a book. If you are smitten with a lust for all things Mahayana—its history, people, practices, and philosophies—look no further. But this is really the best way to characterize how Williams has gone about summarizing fifteen hundred years of Mahayana doctrinal history. Like I said, "loss of control"... The upside of this avalanche of information is that there's something for everyone.