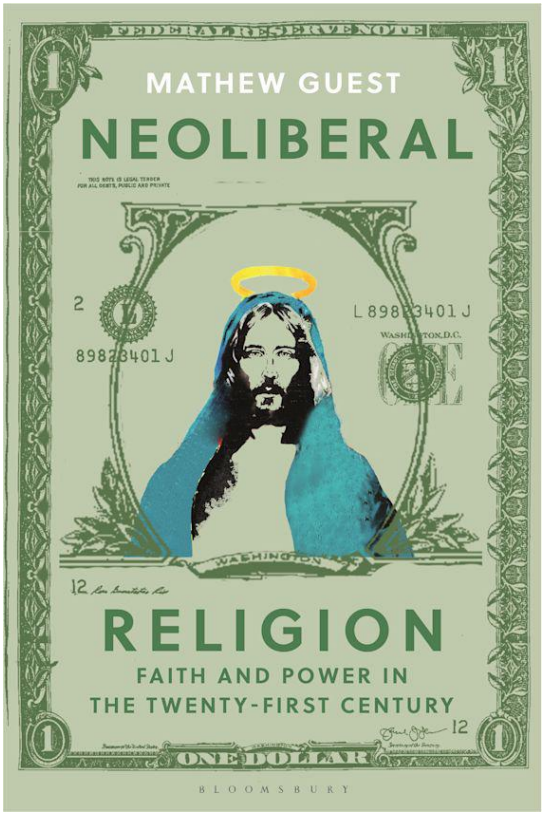
The book proceeds with a series of chapters in which Guest skilfully navigates, on behalf of his reader, literatures addressing religion and markets, religion, populism and nationalism, religion and the power-knowledge nexus in the post-truth era, religion, securitization and the state, religion and the self, religion and difference and neoliberalism, the secular and non-religion. As such, Guest argues that five "cultural forces" are driving the articulation of religion and neoliberalism, specifically (i) "marketization" which "draws religious movements into the logic of commercial markets", (ii) "populism", which "reshapes opportunities for political engagement", (iii) "destabilization of knowledge" which "exposes new ways in which religious innovations become plausible and visible in the public realm", (iv) "patterns of securitization" which "reveal how religion becomes a target of state regulation" and (v) "heightened individualism" which "converges with marketization to produce market orientations to religious selfhood" (p. 166). Importantly, given that woven throughout are paradigmatic cases of economic exploitation, racial prejudice and the stigmatization of communities, Guest is right to argue that the sociology of religion's "neoliberal lens" must, at the same time, be an ethical one (p. 167). If Hayek argued that liberal values were best embedded by allowing markets to establish their own equilibrium without interference from the state, neoliberal experiments in places as diverse as Chile (1973) and Russia (following the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s) suggest that the political conditions most conducive to neoliberal capitalism are not liberal democracy but authoritarianism if not indeed fascism. According to Guest, "the tendency to treat market forces as best unhindered by moral discourse means there is a logic within neoliberalism that resists moral conversation", which "is why that conversation is especially important" (p. 169).



As Guest makes clear, the sociology of religion is no stranger to ethical and moral debates, but sociological research into religion has typically been pursued according to arguments about "methodological atheism" (p. 172) and the dangers of subjective bias. The whole argument about separating facts from values is, however, questionable. Guest finds useful alternatives in the critical sociology of the Frankfurt School and feminist theory, both of which have long distinguished between traditional theory which, under the guise of objectivity has tended to affirm the existing structures and norms of society and critical theory, which is explicitly guided by values which propose the progressive transformation of society (pp. 176-8). Yet even as he notes the complex institutional structures ("the university") within which sociologists of religion are enmeshed and the differing layers of responsibility and accountability that the pursuit of research generates to co-researchers and communities, to peers and colleagues and to institutions, Guest seems so struggle somewhat under the weight of his own undertaking, rather blandly concluding that "ethical questions are likely to be even more unavoidable for the sociology of religion in the future" (p. 182). Notwithstanding, this is a significant volume and Matthew Guest should be praised for his thoughtful navigation of a series of complex, inter-disciplinary debates, and for his attempt to push the sociology of religion into a new direction.

Paul-François Tremlett,
The Open University

HARRISON, P (ED). (2018) *SETTING OUT ON THE GREAT WAY, ESSAYS ON EARLY MAHAYANA BUDDHISM.* EQUINOX PUBLISHING. 320 PP. HBK £75. ISBN: 978 1 78179 096 0.

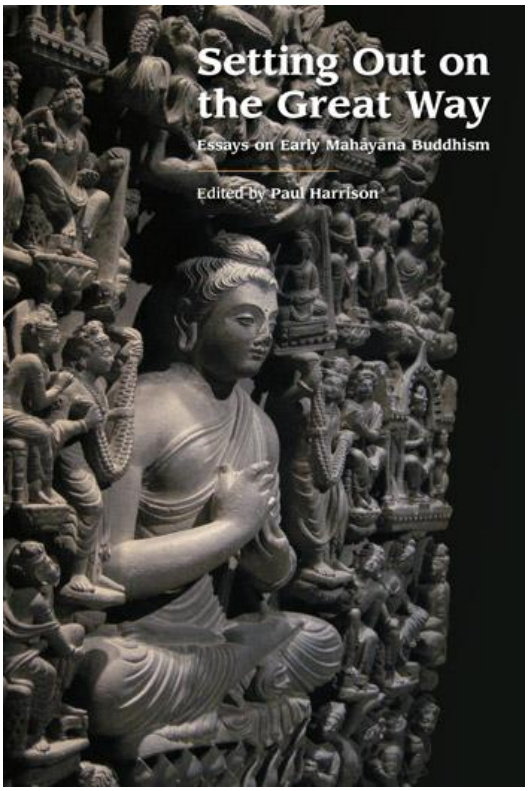
This review must begin with an abject and sincere apology for being so very late, but even now I would like to make modest comment on this complex and in many ways challenging publication. I understand that it can still be acquired, and librarians with an area for Buddhist studies are positively encouraged to find space for a hard copy. By way of excuse for lateness, I plead reflection on the general elasticity of time, especially when it comes to Mahāyāna Buddhism. What, after all, are a few fragile human years against the backdrop of even just one *kalpa*, or the incalculable lifespan of a *tathāgata*?

Indeed, when was the Mahāyāna itself set in motion? The contributions to this work range over two or three centuries. And what was set in motion, a distinctive teaching, a spiritual impulse, a modified form of monastic discipline? Or do we regard as the main characteristic a flowering of mythology and cosmology going far beyond that characteristic of earlier phases of Buddhism? The phrase "setting out" does imply the agency of those who first proposed or initiated the "great vehicle" (the Mahāyāna), and that they set out on a new path, or a greater path, or at least a newly conceived version of the original path. But who were they, and what exactly did they propose? The contributors to *Setting out on the Great Way* are evidently conscious that they and others have been working on the matter for a long time, and yet the field investigated still seems to be quite untidy. For example, the editor Paul Harrison himself signals a notable divergence over the so-called "forest hypothesis" which is now critically reviewed by fellow contributor David Drewes and noted as being quite absent from a sutra from Gandhāra studied by Otto Strauch (see below).

The underlying question is how did the earlier phases of Buddhism come to morph into that great religio-cultural flowering known as the Mahāyāna? For it surely did, and it is counterproductive to complain of the evils of essentialism (as on page 23) if that means that coherence is denied altogether. This does seem to be the drift of Paul Harrison's introduction, where we are already given the somewhat impatient view (not further argued in detail) that the Lotus Sutra is "unlikely to be an early Mahāyāna sutra anyway" (p. 13)! Leaving aside precise questions about what would count as "early" (The Perfection of Insight sutras admittedly have pride of place, see studies elsewhere by Edward Conze and Lewis Lancaster) such an attitude perhaps explains why for more than a century no self-confident Indologist has taken the trouble to provide an up-to-date translation of the Lotus Sutra, that is, since Kern's pioneer English in Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East, Vol XXI*. This appeared in 1884 (following Burnouf's posthumous French version of 1852) – with some rather wild footnotes about solar mythology. In the meantime, students using English have made do for decades with various competing translations from Kumarajīva's Chinese (with its different ordering of chapters), worthwhile though these may be in themselves. But there is no doubt that "the Lotus" was a relatively early Mahāyāna composition, or compilation. If some parts are later than others, then some parts are, after all, earlier.

It comes as something of a relief to read in the second contribution to this volume, Peter Skilling's "How the Unborn was Born - The Riddle of Mahayana Origins" that the Mahāyāna can be briefly characterised under two points, namely advocacy of the bodhisattva path as the way to Buddhahood, and the idea that "all dharmas are unborn and unceasing" (p.34). The second of these points is summed up as meaning that dharmas (i.e. all the analysable factors of existence) are without substance (one might gloss as "persistent substance") or own-being (presumably rendering *svabhāva*). While this corresponds approximately to the already current ideas of impermanence and non-self, it is taken up into the idea that dharmas are "empty" (of substantial being) and therefore cannot be perceived or grasped. I would further explain that to understand this is to let go of them and thereby to be released. Skilling suspects that these two points cannot be separated, and indeed he is right, for this is, as a spiritual process, the very path of the bodhisattva (or *bodhisatva*, as he

learnedly prefers to spell it, see his footnote 1), who is then devoted to freeing others from their entanglements. So perhaps there is a kind of "essence" to the Mahāyāna after all, even though this term has recently become so unpopular. In what may seem to some to be a slight jump, Skilling sees the further elaboration of this path, indeed the very task of a bodhisattva, as being summed up in a widely commended "concern for the preservation of the three jewels," a theme found in a variety of texts, and certainly popular in Theravada lands. There are long quotations about this with Sanskrit and Tibetan in the footnotes. In conclusion we learn from Skilling that the Mahāyāna was "born as a congeries of pragmatic, liturgical, and metaphysical innovations in response to the centuries of change that followed Śākyamuni's great decease." (p.53) This may be true enough, and yet one misses the connection back to the two leading points set forth at the outset; rather we now learn, for example, that the Mahāyāna is "a path of merit and a path of protection" (p.54), also a view current in Theravada lands, and indeed that the Mahāyāna is needed to "come to the rescue" in this insecure world (p.55), and so forth.



The theme of a *multifaceted* development is taken up approvingly by Johannes Bronkhorst who sets out its main exponents beginning with the work of Gregory Schopen in a helpful manner. The current trend, for also espoused by Harrison, Shimoda and Boucher in this volume, is to argue that the origin of the Mahāyāna is not to be found in one single element. Bronkhorst's main concern however is to highlight the emergence of a particular theme current in Greater Gandhāra, namely to the effect that the dharmas commonly listed in Buddhist texts were themselves alone the locus of reality, rather than any more complex entities deriving from them. This then became the backdrop for the further assertion that even the last-analysis dharmas do not exist but are empty (of own-being). This does not necessarily explain the provenance of all aspects of the Mahāyāna, the bodhisattva ideal for example being another matter, but it does suggest a specific locus for one leading feature, says Bronkhorst. He refers to this development as an "intellectual revolution" (and indeed *abhidharma* is often categorised as an intellectual matter), but it might equally be regarded as a spiritual shift (see further below).

With reference to Gandhāra the question of geographical divergence is raised, and with it social rather than intellectual divergence. This seems to have provided the underlying tension for the so-called "forest hypothesis", previously advanced by Harrison and others. The attraction of this hypothesis, i.e. that the Mahāyāna was developed by spiritual adepts who had withdrawn from society, is supposed to have lain in a certain tiredness with an apparently increasing focus on lay devotees. It is in this sense a social theory; but unfortunately, it is one which lacks any substantial sociological basis and (naturally) is no longer accessible for fieldwork. In the contribution by David Drewes entitled "The Forest Hypothesis" it is also criticised for other reasons. In particular, he argues that it was unduly influenced by assumptions about the importance of attainment of enlightenment in this life spread by Suzuki Daisetsu, who himself is said to have over-corrected the older Anglo-German idea that Buddhism as set out in the Pali Canon was a more or less rational matter. Although Suzuki was pursuing and pro-

moting his own agenda, it may be commented in passing that the idea of "attaining Buddhahood [i.e. enlightenment] in this very life" (*sokushin jōbutsu*) in fact has a substantial pedigree in Japanese Buddhism. Note also that while Harrison, in his introduction, seems to be reluctantly withdrawing from the "forest hypothesis" he also holds out the prospect of a further critical examination of the arguments adduced.

There is rather more sympathy for the significance of the presumed "forest monks" in Daniel Boucher's "Recruitment and Retention in early Buddhist Sodalities" in which the idea of a single hypothesis of origin for the Mahāyāna is again rejected. Boucher draws analogies from the various strains and tensions exhibited by the pioneers of modern-day new religious movements to seek hints as to why new texts were pushed forward by a variety of new groups that, taken together, came to be regarded as the Mahāyāna. Fascinating though such speculation is, it unfortunately remains in the realm of speculation due to our inability to access any substantial evidence from a social field. The argument is best taken as a healthy reminder that new texts, with shifts of vocabulary and thought, were indeed produced by real persons, even if their identity, not least thanks to the very nature of the "thus I have heard" sutra genre, is lost from view. In this respect the innovators were in any case very different from any modern counterparts in new religious movements, who usually cherish a personality cult.

Similar hints from phenomena nearer to our own times are offered by Douglas Osto in "Altered States and the Origins of the Mahayana". The point is argued in persuasive detail and indeed it was surely the case that at least some Mahāyāna texts corresponded to "visions" or "trance-like states" which could be reiterated precisely with the help of the texts in question, and in at least some of which a marvellous *samādhi* is imaginatively set forth, opening up a vision of new worlds, or in new-speak, multiverses. His exploration is reminiscent of, but apparently not dependent on discussions of this subject current in the late nineteen-sixties. Full marks to Osto for mentioning the Lotus Sutra in this regard. He might have gone on to discuss the very genre of "visualisation" sutras, but of course these were later, and Sanskrit originals are mainly unknown. Both Boucher and Osto, in their own ways, are addressing what I used to call "the psychology of sutra production" and this is surely an aspect worthy to be carefully reflected upon, and indeed suggestively treated in these papers. But clues to the processes may be found above all in the texts themselves. I would here merely suggest that the psychology of Buddhist sutra production (focused on the phrase "thus I have heard") is rather different from that of the production of "holy scriptures" or "bibles" as in the American Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) or in some of the new religions of Japan such as Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō.

In Sasaki Shizuka's contribution, "The Concept of 'Remodelling the World'" similar considerations are hovering in the background, without becoming explicit. He focuses on the appearance of the fascinating Buddha known as Akṣobhya, whose deeds, vows and visions are set forth in a sutra regarded as being very early, even pre-dating the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Be that as it may, it is of primary significance as an early example of the way in which the early Mahāyāna imagination worked. Subliminally, the parallel with the sutras concerning Amitābha will not fail to make itself felt. The paradoxical effect of the *Ārya-Akṣobhya tathāgatasya vyūha* coming into prominence, particularly through the work of Satō Naomi, is on the one hand to relativise the high visibility of the Amida texts of Pure Land Buddhism, and on the other hand to increase the venerable appearance of such texts in general in the early development of the Mahāyāna. That makes it easier for Amida Buddhists to argue that their key writings are typical of original Mahāyāna (even if not demonstrably the very earliest) and thereby even true to original Buddhism (as Mahāyāna is presumed by Pure Land followers to be). It should be noted that Sasaki is not actually arguing this; but what can be drawn from his presentation is that the imaginative invention of further "worlds" as in the case of Akṣobhya Tathāgata was a persistent element in the original Mahāyāna mix. A consideration of emptiness alone is not enough.

Nevertheless, the notion of emptiness is persistent, and we have already seen that Johannes Bronkhorst seeks to work out its