

The Splendid Vision: Reading a Buddhist Sutra



Featuring the first-ever English translation of the Splendid Vision Sutra, a sixth-century Indian Mahayana Buddhist scripture known for its rich ritual magic and worship of bodhisattva-goddesses, this volume explicates the texts cultural significance as a source of extraordinary value, cosmic truth, and existential meaning. The ancient author of the Splendid Vision Sutra promises every imaginable reward to those who heed its words and rites, whether ones desire is to become king, enjoy heavenly pleasures for thousands of millennia, or attain the spiritual summit of advanced bodhisattvahood. Richard S. Cohen carefully analyzes this religious rhetoric, developing a heuristic model of scripture that extends beyond Buddhist literature. In his framework, a text becomes sacred scripture when a community accepts it as a receptacle of extraordinary value, an authoritative source of cosmic truth, and a guide for meaningful action. While clarifying these points, Cohen untangles the discursive skein through which the Splendid Vision Sutra expresses its authority, inspires readers to accept that authority, and promises superior power and accomplishments to those who implement its teachings. Exploring ways of living and reading a text, Cohen draws on Marcel Duchamps theory of found art, Jerzy Grotowskis idealization of the holy actor, and other formulations, identifying contingencies, uncertainties, and incompleteness in the lived present and its determination of our reception of the past. More than a mere introduction to an important work, The Splendid Vision opens a window into religious experience and practice in contemporary environments as well as in the world of the sutra.

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