

**Book Review:*****Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*****Dedy Irawan**

STIAB Jinarakkhita, Bandar Lampung, Indonesia

Author for correspondence; email: dedy713@gmail.com

**Introduction**

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.

**Author's Background**

Paul Williams is an Emeritus Professor of Indian and Tibetan Philosophy and Co-director of the Centre for Buddhist Studies at the University of Bristol. He was a former President of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies (Williams, 2009). Among his other books are *Altruism and Reality: Studies in the Philosophy of the Bodhicaryavatara* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998) and *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan Madhyamaka Defence* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998). After he converted to Catholicism (Williams, 2002, xiii), he wrote *Buddhism from a Catholic Perspective* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2006) and *The Unexpected Way: On Converting from Buddhism to Catholicism* (London: T & T Clark, 2002).

**Book Analysis**

In this book, Williams introduces the ideas of Mahayana Buddhism and some recent findings in the field of Buddhist Studies. Also, this book is aimed for more advanced students as references for further studies (Williams, 2009, x). I contend that the book serves the author's purpose for his

readers, because it offers an introduction to Mahayana Buddhism.

Williams's "Introduction" provides a historical account of Mahayana Buddhism. His account is comprehensive for introducing Mahayana Buddhism because he bases his writing on academic scholarship, which covers multifaceted factors on the origin of Mahayana Buddhism. Williams brings in significant research on the origin of Mahayana, especially from Lamotte, Dutt, Hirakawa, Schopen, Gombrich, and Harrison (Williams, 2009, 21-25). Williams use their scholarly works to provide multifaceted factors that contribute to the development of Mahayana, such as 1) political situations during the advent of Mahayana (Williams, 2009, 10), 2) the recognition of kings as Bodhisattvas (Williams, 2009, 11), 3) early Buddhist texts with doctrinal innovation (Williams, 2009, 13-14), 4) reaction to illicit, wealthy, and metropolitan monastic institutions (Williams, 2009, 15-16), 5) antipathetic responses towards Abhidharma literature (Williams, 2009, 17), and 6) the five points of Mahādeva and "supramundane" Buddha of Lokottaravādin (Williams, 2009, 19-21). Thus, we can see Williams' research provide various factors on the historical account of Mahayana Buddhism. Based on this historical account, his readers will gain a sufficient introduction on the origin of Mahayana Buddhism.

Not only Williams' "Introduction", but also the structure of his book gradually introduces the key teachings of Mahayana Buddhism — wisdom and compassion. This structure presents introductory materials on Mahayana doctrines. The presentation on wisdom starts with topics, which are also the titles of his chapter: "Prajñāpāramitā", "Mādhyamika", "Yogācāra", "Tathāgatagarbha", "Avataṃsaka", and "Saddharmapuṇḍarīka". Then, Williams presents the chapter, "The bodies of the Buddha", as the conclusion of wisdom and compassion practices. Finally, he elaborates on how to achieve these bodies by realizing compassion, generating *bodhicitta*, pursuing the path of Bodhisattva, and relying on trust and devotion towards compassionate Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Unlike other books on Mahayana Buddhism, such as that by Nalinaksha Dutt (1978), the structure of Williams's book follows core Mahayana concepts of wisdom and compassion. This pattern introduces his audiences the points of Mahayana Buddhism, both in content and structure.

In composing his book, Williams employs textual studies from both primary and secondary sources. The studies and sources he used are a good start for introducing Mahayana doctrines for his readers. Each chap-

ter of his book offers an adequate introduction to Mahayana. For example, on Yogācāra's doctrine, Williams discusses core Yogācāra doctrines, such as the "three natures" (Williams, 2009, 88-92), "mind" (Williams, 2009, 92-96), and "substratum and immaculate consciousness" (Williams, 2009, 97-100). Williams elaborates on the definition of Three Natures based on some important Yogācāra' texts – *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*, *Mahāyānasāṅgraha*, and *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*. In elucidating the Three Natures, Williams also cites some significant Yogācārin scholarly works, such as Lamotte, Schmithausen, Willis, Turman, and Lindtner (Williams, 2009, 90-92). Indeed, Williams's textual studies on Yogācāra's doctrines offer a good departing point for studying Yogācāra due to his primary and secondary sources. Although Williams's studies cannot cover the entirety of Yogacara per se, still his studies provide a beginning step for introducing specific Mahayana doctrines. Thus, Williams's textual studies are a good starting point for introducing Mahayana Buddhism.

For his intended audiences, Williams's book is also supplemented by endnotes (Williams, 2009, 267-388), indexes of names (Williams, 2009, 422-429) and subjects (Williams, 2009, 430-438), and references (Williams, 2009, 389-421). Furthermore, this book contains arrangement of chapters, which are not only helpful for introducing Mahayana Buddhism, but also for pursuing advanced studies on relevant topics. The organization of Williams's book does not mean that his audience needs to read the book in the same order. Each chapter is distinct so that his audience can understand specific chapters without having to read the previous chapters; even if one does not fully understand some figures and technical terms, one can easily refer to his indexes of names and subjects for further clarification. Moreover, if the readers need to do further research on a specific topic, the bulk of Williams's endnotes and references are a reliable source. By relying on his notes and references, his readers will gain sufficient sources for more advanced research. Hence, the fact that his readers can read the chapters independently and that there are rich supplements for his book fosters a thorough introduction to Mahayana Buddhism and further exploration on particular topics.

## Conclusion

Williams's book provides his audiences a valuable introduction to Mahayana Buddhism. In fact, this book also contains more benefit than his intent. For example, we can find a basic instruction on Mahayana prac-

tices. On “The Path of the Bodhisattva”, Williams describes briefly on how to develop compassion and *bodhicitta*. Consequently, we can be convinced that this book successfully accomplishes the goal that it intends – being an introduction to Mahayana Buddhism – and that this book may also function as a bridge for academia and practitioners.

## References

Williams, P. (2009). *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. New York: Routledge.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2002). *The Unexpected Way: On Converting from Buddhism to Catholicism*. London: T & T Clark.

Dutt, N. (1978). *Mahāyāna Buddhism*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.