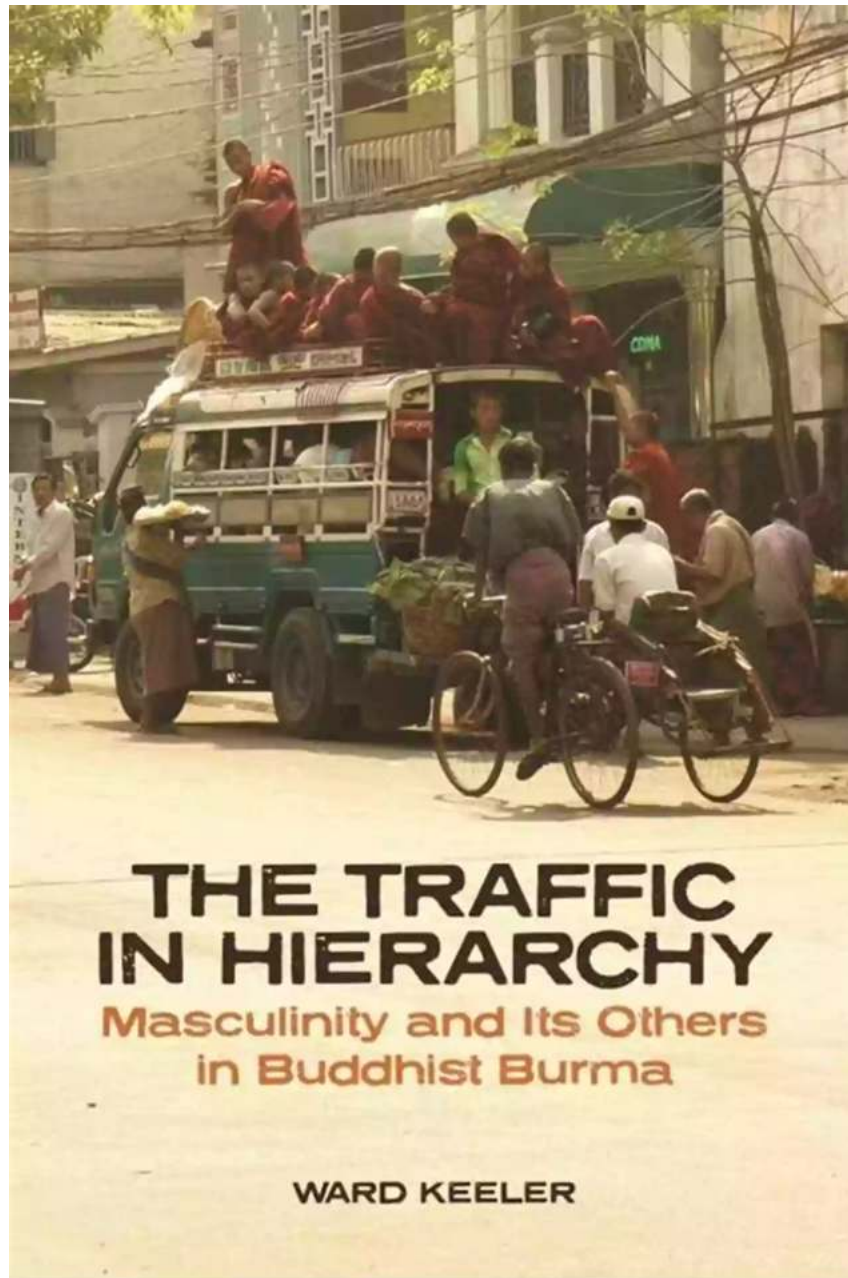


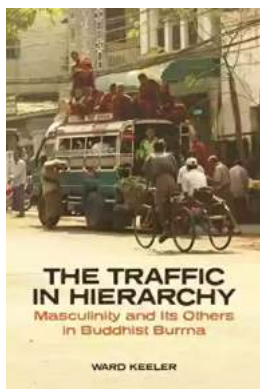
Masculinity And Its Others In Buddhist Burma



In the largely male-dominated society of Buddhist Burma, the idea of masculinity takes on various meanings and implications. From a young age, Burmese boys are taught to adhere to certain societal norms and expectations that shape their understanding of what it means to be a man. However, the complexities of masculinity in this context cannot be simply reduced to a singular definition. It is

through an exploration of the intersections of masculinity and its "others" that we gain a deeper understanding of how these ideas are constructed and redefined in Buddhist Burma.

One of the most significant aspects of masculinity in Buddhist Burma is the association with power and authority. Traditionally, men hold positions of leadership and decision-making within the religious and political spheres. This dominance is reinforced through teachings that emphasize the importance of male authority and control. As a result, men are often seen as the primary gatekeepers of spiritual knowledge, exerting their influence over others.



The Traffic in Hierarchy: Masculinity and Its Others in Buddhist Burma

by Andaluna Borcila (Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

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Print length : 353 pages

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However, this conception of masculinity as power and authority is not without its contradictions. Within Burmese culture, there exists a belief in the influence of nats, or spirits, on daily life. These spirits are often associated with femininity and are believed to possess supernatural powers. The presence of nats challenges the notion of male superiority, as their power and influence cannot be dismissed. In fact, nat worshippers, most of whom are women, play a significant role in

challenging these patriarchal norms, creating spaces for alternative expressions of gender and identity.

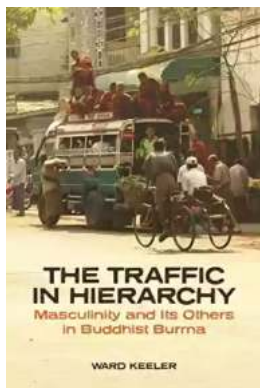
Furthermore, the practice of meditation, which is deeply rooted in Buddhist teachings, challenges traditional notions of masculinity. Meditation is typically seen as a means of self-discovery and inner transformation, emphasizing qualities such as compassion, empathy, and mindfulness. These qualities are often associated with femininity, challenging the dominant narrative of masculinity as assertive and competitive. In this context, men who engage in meditation are redefining masculinity by embracing these traditionally "feminine" qualities.

Another aspect to consider is the impact of globalization and modernity on the construction of masculinity in Buddhist Burma. With the increasing connectivity to the outside world, Burmese men are exposed to different ideas and expectations of masculinity. Influenced by Western ideals portrayed through media and popular culture, they are faced with the pressure to conform to these new standards. This clash of traditional and modern values creates tension and ambiguity in the understanding of masculinity.

It is also important to acknowledge the experiences of marginalized communities within Buddhist Burma, such as LGBTQ+ individuals. In a society that largely upholds heteronormativity, these individuals often face discrimination and exclusion. The exploration of masculinity in Buddhist Burma cannot be complete without recognizing the struggles faced by those who do not conform to traditional gender norms. The presence of these "others" highlights the limitations and flaws in the dominant narrative of masculinity.

, masculinity in Buddhist Burma is a multifaceted concept that is shaped by various social, cultural, and historical factors. While there is a dominant narrative that associates masculinity with power and authority, the presence of alternative

expressions of gender and identity challenges these norms. The intersections of masculinity and its "others" invite us to critically examine and deconstruct these understandings in order to create a more inclusive and equitable society.



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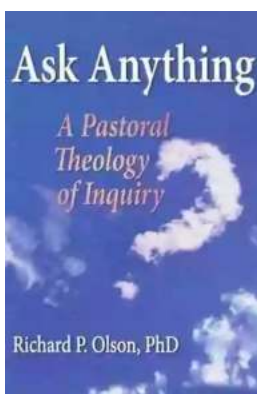
Until its recent political thaw, Burma was closed to most foreign researchers, and fieldwork-based research was rare. In *The Traffic in Hierarchy*, one of the few such works to appear in recent years, author Ward Keeler combines close ethnographic attention to life in a Buddhist monastery with a broad analysis of Burman gender ideology. The result is a thought-provoking analysis of Burmese social relations both within and beyond a monastery's walls.

Keeler shows that the roles individuals choose in Burman society entail inevitable trade-offs in privileges and prestige. A man who becomes a monk gives up some social opportunities but takes on others and gains great respect. Alternatively, a man can become a head of household. Or he can choose to take on a feminine gender identity—to the derision of many but not necessarily his social exclusion. A woman, by contrast, is expected to concern herself with her relations with

family and kin. Any interest she might show in becoming a nun arouses ambivalent reactions: although it fulfills Buddhist teachings, it contravenes assumptions about a woman's proper role.

In Burma, hierarchical understandings condition all relationships, but hierarchy implies relations of exchange, not simply inequality, and everyone takes on subordinate roles in their bonds with some, and superordinate ones with others. Knowing where power lies and how to relate to it appropriately is key. It may mean choosing at times to resist power, but more often it involves exercising care as to whom one wishes to subordinate oneself, in what ways, and on what terms.

Melding reflections on the work of theorists such as Dumont, Anderson, Warner, and Kapferer with close attention to the details of Burman social interaction, Keeler balances theoretical insights and ethnographic observation to produce a rich and challenging read. The conundrum at the heart of this book—whether to opt for autonomy, the Buddhist seeking of detachment, or for attachment, the desire for close bonds with others—is one that all humans, not just Burmans, must confront, and it is one that admits of no final resolution.



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