



Becoming the Buddha: The Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand (Buddhisms: A Princeton University Press Series)

Donald K. Swearer

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Becoming the Buddha is the first book-length study of a key ritual of Buddhist practice in Asia: the consecration of a Buddha image or "new Buddha," a ceremony by which the Buddha becomes present or alive. Through a richly detailed, accessible exploration of this ritual in northern Thailand, an exploration that stands apart from standard text-based or anthropological approaches, Donald Swearer makes a major contribution to our understanding of the Buddha image, its role in Buddhist devotional life, and its relationship to the veneration of Buddha relics. Blending ethnography, analysis, and Buddhist texts related to this mimetic reenactment of the night of the Buddha's enlightenment, he demonstrates that the image becomes the Buddha's surrogate by being invested with the Buddha's story and charged with the extraordinary power of Buddhahood. The process by which this transformation occurs through chant, sermon, meditation, and the presence of charismatic monks is at the heart of this book.

Known as "opening the eyes of the Buddha," image consecration traditions throughout Buddhist Asia share much in common. Within the cultural context of northern Thailand, *Becoming the Buddha* illuminates scriptural accounts of the making of the first Buddha image; looks at debates over the ritual's historical origin, at Buddhological insights achieved, and at the hermeneutics of absence and presence; and provides a thematic comparison of several Buddhist traditions.

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