

dhists, like male religious leaders in other cultures, established normative behavior for women by creating certain ideals of femininity. At the same time, men's opportunities for interaction with women were minimized by the restrictions of devout practice. In early Buddhist monastic communities, interaction with laywomen was necessary for economic support but otherwise was avoided. When we find texts in which the sacred is represented as masculine while the profane or imperfect is represented as feminine, we have a polarization that suggests both internal psychological conflicts and external social barriers between the sexes.

These Buddhist texts, many of which are translated for the first time, should be of considerable interest to students of religion as well as to feminists. At a time when Buddhism is rapidly increasing in importance both as a subject of academic investigation and as a popular religion in the West, Western women are undergoing a fundamental change in their understanding of their roles in society. As this tradition of religious thought moves into a Western society that is self-consciously reexamining sexual roles, it is important to explore the Mahāyāna Buddhist images of the feminine, which offer an opportunity for Western readers to examine the sexual typification in an important religious tradition.

The texts, a small sampling of the vast corpus of Mahāyāna literature, offer a fascinating perspective on sexual role formation. From a feminist perspective, one perceives a destructive, complex set of images preventing women from fulfillment within the Buddhist religion. From a male perspective, one can sense fascination and alienation. These texts reveal as much about men's self-concept in relation to women as they do about the effects of these texts on women's self-image. The imagery of a mysterious and elusive woman shows men's feelings of wonder and curiosity. At times, women must have felt