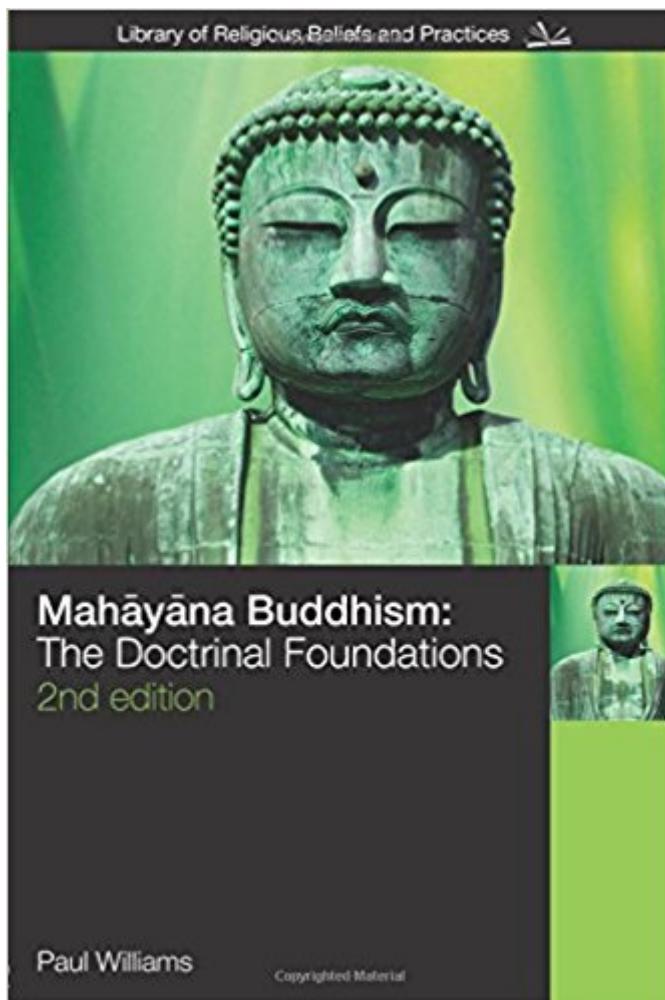


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# **Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations (The Library Of Religious Beliefs And Practices)**



## Synopsis

Originating in India, Mahayana Buddhism spread across Asia, becoming the prevalent form of Buddhism in Tibet and East Asia. Over the last twenty-five years Western interest in Mahayana has increased considerably, reflected both in the quantity of scholarly material produced and in the attraction of Westerners towards Tibetan Buddhism and Zen. Paul Williams' *Mahayana Buddhism* is widely regarded as the standard introduction to the field, used internationally for teaching and research and has been translated into several European and Asian languages. This new edition has been fully revised throughout in the light of the wealth of new studies and focuses on the religion's diversity and richness. It includes much more material on China and Japan, with appropriate reference to Nepal, and for students who wish to carry their study further there is a much-expanded bibliography and extensive footnotes and cross-referencing. Everyone studying this important tradition will find Williams' book the ideal companion to their studies. 

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The publication of Paul Williams' *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* in 1989 was a milestone in the development of Buddhist Studies, being the first truly comprehensive and authoritative attempt to chart the doctrinal landscape of Mahayana Buddhism in its entirety. Previous scholars like Edward Conze and Etienne Lamotte had set themselves this daunting task, but it had proved beyond them. Williams not only succeeded in finishing the job, but

did it so well that his book has remained the primary work on the subject, and the textbook of choice for teachers of university courses on Buddhism, for 20 years. It is still unrivalled. This makes a second edition all the more welcome. Williams has extensively revised and updated the book in the light of the considerable scholarship published in this area since 1989, at the same time enlarging many of his thoughtful discussions of Mahayana Buddhist philosophical issues. The result is a tour de force of breadth and depth combined. I confidently expect that Williams' richly detailed map of this field will remain for decades to come an indispensable guide to all those who venture into it.

Paul Harrison, Stanford University, USA

Paul Williams is Professor of Indian and Tibetan Philosophy and Co-director of the Centre for Buddhist Studies at the University of Bristol. The author of six books and an editor of a further eight, he is a former President of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies. Among his other books for Routledge is *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (2000).

After a few years of practicing Buddhism and reading Dharma books, I am reading this as my first scholarly text, and I'm very impressed by it. It certainly is NOT an introduction for beginners, but Williams is careful to include just enough explanation to keep me reading without feeling a need to resort to Wikipedia (heh!). His footnotes (endnotes) are amazing -- the book proper is only 266 pages, followed by 121 pages of endnotes. I'm skipping most of these, but when I do dip into them, I'm even more impressed by Williams's unusual ability to stick to a central idea and successfully separate out the interesting surrounding ideas (which need not muddy up the main text). I also appreciate his ability to steer clear of Western philosophy. He is presenting the history, central texts and teachings, and disputes of the Mahayana with well-focused discipline. He does this with clarity, occasional stunning insights, and sometimes even a touch of humor! (I especially like it when he refers to "old and basic" ideas of Buddhism; he seems to have a particularly good sense of his audience for this book.) It's very nice to get a sense of how certain issues were divisive (or not) without being lost in excessive detail about each and every school's (or lineage's) take on the matter. That is not to say Williams is treating the subject superficially but rather another indication of his clear focus. Don't consider this book if you know very little about Buddhism at present. But if you are well-grounded in the teachings and have some idea of the "place" of Mahayana, and you want to experience an academic approach to the subject, this book will not disappoint you. P.S. I'm reading (more than halfway through) the new second edition.

I would recommend this book mainly to practitioners who already have an understanding of Buddhism. However, if you have practiced for a while and you are looking for a book that explains and summarizes different aspects and traditions within Mahayana, this might be for you. Specifically this book addresses (divided into wisdom / compassion): Prajnaparamita Sutras Madhyamaka Cittamatra Buddha-nature Hua-yen (Flower Garland tradition) Lotus Sutra Bodies of Buddhas and path of the bodhisattvas Faith and devotion Most of the segments are about 10 to 30 pages long: long enough to give me a sense where to direct my studies or search when I am attempting to expand on a teaching. It is not necessarily an easy read, but worthwhile.

I would recommend this book for all those who are willing to have a deep knowledge about Buddhism. After reading many books about meditation, and comments about sutras by people like D. Lama and T. Deshimaru, M. Ricard, J Kornfied I thought that it was mandatory to look for the history that was behind those texts that many buddhism's writers talk about. This book was the right answer for my inquietud.

PERFECT. When something is perfect, agile and also accurate in what it explains about the greater and lesser Buddhism you know it is good. I was long a Mahayana Buddhist before the publication of this work. All I read were books of the sayings of the Buddha, Buddhist scholars, books written for initiates tend to turn me off but this is both good for home and as a textbook. Can I, do I recommend you read this? Yes. Over and over. Aside from books in Buddhist monasteries written by Buddhas following our Gautama Buddha there was little that was truly understood. I would always get mad when someone would flippantly, so perfectly jaded and bathed in irony, say Buddhism is not a religion, that there is no God is Buddhism is a fool. Read and learn. Do not accept the lies and fake wisdom of others. Paul Williams, I applaud him in his research and presentation of this greatest of Buddhist sects. I do not like Zen. I think Zen is the Pentecostal side of Buddhism and many will argue with me about it, but if I were Zen then I would be compelled to urinate on them during the argument if I were so inclined. Mahayana Buddhism is the cradle of knowledge. Do not let this die on the shelf. Buy it. Read it. You need not be Buddhist to consume and use the knowledge, you just need a mind capable of understanding cause and effect. Buy this book.

I found this book extremely helpful on mutiple levels. Beyond the fact that Mahayana Buddhism suffers from a lack of cohesive literature combined, Williams counters this problem in his gathering of doctrine and his own insight on the history, evolution, and spread of Mahayana. He shows great

detail to the evolution of each "school" and how it was affected by the geographic, ethnic, and cultural environments that formed each branches specifics. A historical paper trail is formed for many of the major works attributed to Mahayanist thought, so that we see roots formed. This grants immense clarity to many misunderstandings about certain school ideologies that might appear completely unrelated until all the details are shown within Williams book. Although there are no actual sutras translated, the book is a perfect starting point for philosophies, history, and a listing of many of the great Mahayana sutras, which one could then find available to start forming an actual library for practice and reference. As a Priest in the Pure Land tradition and trained in both Mahayana and Theravadin, this book stands apart in my findings of authors that spread knowledge in quantity and quality instead of minute chunks for only lineage lip service.

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