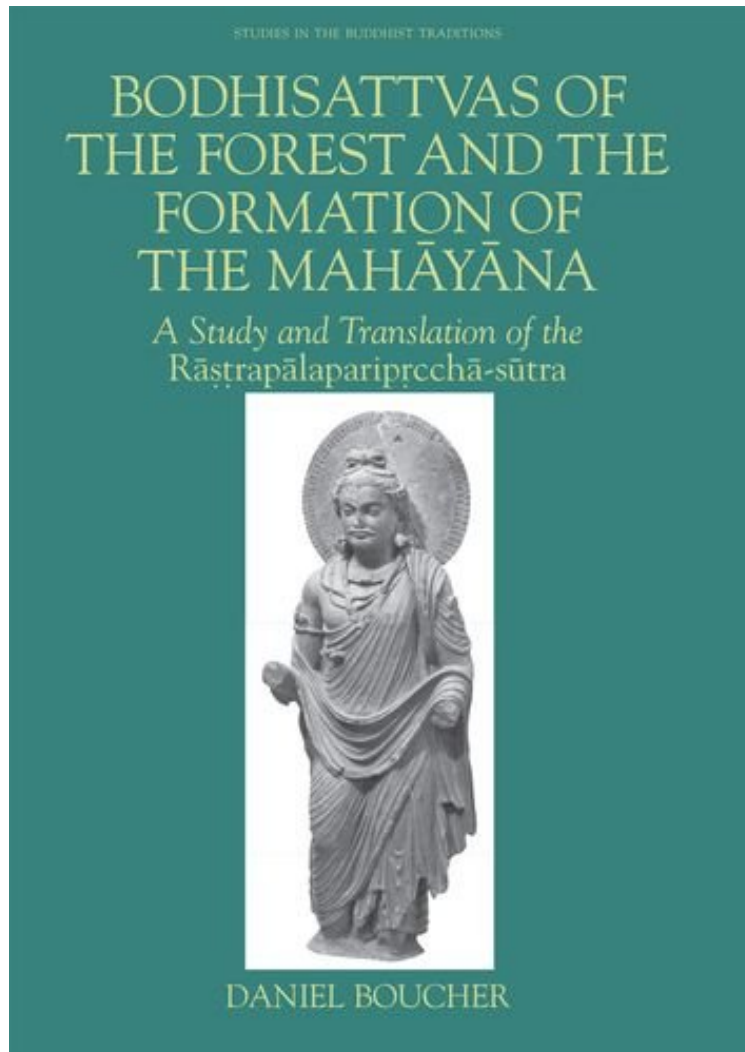


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Bodhisattvas of the Forest and the Formation of the Mahayana: A Study and Translation of the Rastrapalapariprccha-sutra (Studies in the Buddhist Traditions)

Daniel Boucher

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Daniel Boucher : Bodhisattvas of the Forest and the Formation of the Mahayana: A Study and Translation of the Rastrapalapariprccha-sutra (Studies in the Buddhist Traditions) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bodhisattvas of the Forest and the Formation of the Mahayana: A Study and Translation of the Rastrapalapariprccha-sutra (Studies in the Buddhist Traditions):

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Contextualizing Mahayana Buddhism By Darrol G. Pierson This is the best book I have read so far placing the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism in its historical context. It does not present a sentimental view of this emergence or present it as some great glorious hope. Rather this book sees the emergence as an element in a real concrete social context.

Bodhisattvas of the Forest delves into the socioreligious milieu of the authors, editors, and propagators of the *Rastrapalapariprccha-sutra* (Questions of Rastrapala), a Buddhist text circulating in India during the first half of the first millennium C.E. In this meticulously researched study, Daniel Boucher first reflects upon the problems that plague historians of Mahayana Buddhism, whose previous efforts to comprehend the tradition have often ignored the social dynamics that motivated some of the innovations of this new literature. Following that is a careful analysis of several motifs found in the Indian text and an examination of the value of the earliest Chinese translation for charting the sutras evolution. The first part of the study looks at the relationship between the bodily glorification of the Buddha and the ascetic careers spanning thousands of lifetimes that produced it within the socioeconomic world of early medieval Buddhist monasticism. The authors of the *Rastrapala* sharply criticize their monastic contemporaries for rejecting the rigorous lifestyle of the first Buddhist communities, an ideal that, for the sutras authors, self-consciously imitates the disciplines and sacrifices of the Buddhas own bodhisattva career, the very career that led to his acquisition of bodily perfection. Thus, Boucher reveals the ways in which the authors of the *Rastrapala* authors co-opted this topos concerning the bodily perfection of the Buddha from the Mainstream tradition to subvert their co-religionists whose behavior they regarded as representing a degenerate version of that tradition. In Part 2 Boucher focuses on the third-century Chinese translation of the sutra attributed to Dharmaraksa and traces the changes in the translation to the late tenth century. The significance of this translation, Boucher explains, is to be found in the ways it differs from all other witnesses. These differences, which are significant, almost certainly reveal an earlier shape of the sutra before later editors were inspired to alter dramatically the texts tone and rhetoric. The early Chinese translations, though invaluable in revealing developments in the Indian milieu that led to changes in the text, present particular challenges to the interpreter. It takes an understanding of not only their abstruse idiom, but also the process by which they were rendered from an undetermined Indian language into a Chinese cultural product. One of the signal contributions of this study is Bouchers skill at identifying the traces left by the process and ability to uncover clues about the nature of the source text as well as the world of the principal recipients. *Bodhisattvas of the Forest* concludes with an annotated translation of the *Rastrapalapariprccha-sutra* based on a new reading of its earliest extant Sanskrit manuscript. The translation takes note of important variants in Chinese and Tibetan versions to correct the many corruptions of the Sanskrit manuscript.

This important study makes the *Rastrapalapariprccha-sutra* available, for the first time, in an English translation that highlights the differences between the oldest version (a third-century Chinese translation) and the much later Sanskrit version. Highly recommended for all those who are interested in the process of evolution of Mahayana scriptures over time --Jan Nattier, International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University Kudos and bravos to Daniel Boucher are definitely in order. Other scholars have given us studies of the Buddha's body, jataka stories, ascetic practices, and forest monks, but this study of the *Rastrapalapariprccha-sutra* goes beyond what others have suggested to make convincing connections between these topics and the formation (or formations) of the Mahayana movement. --John Strong, Bates College About the Author Daniel Boucher is associate professor of Sino-Indian Buddhism in the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell University.