



The Buddha's Second Renunciation: doubt, groundlessness and autonomy in contemporary Western Buddhism

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In the life-myth of Sakyamuni Buddha, the yet-to-be-enlightened Siddhartha Gautama enters into a second great renunciation when he leaves his Hindu teachers and yogi colleagues after six years of forest austerities and practice with them, for an absolute solitude without the validation or religious succour of an authority, a rishi, a father figure. This archetypal moment in the myth of the Buddha's enlightenment can be seen as both a compelling metaphor of and analogue to a major trend in recent Western Buddhist culture.

This paper seeks to identify the nature and philosophical-ethical bases of such a trend toward self-legitimation in Western Buddhist practise, grounded on the work of senior contemporary Buddhist (or 'post-Buddhist') thinkers, teachers and writers Stephen Batchelor, Alan Clements, and Professor David Loy. In different ways all propose a considered rethinking of doubt or a functionally dynamic 'groundlessness', as essential to authentic self-determination in Buddhist practise. To what degree such doubt becomes oppositional to the intentions of the buddhadharma remains paradoxical, yet, they claim, integrable to the true aims of its path. This enquiry explores, from a Buddhist as well as Western existential perspective, how such claims meaningfully maintain a fidelity to the essential aims of Buddhist practice, or transform them as a direct response to their new conditions in the West.