

**LECTURE FOR E-LEARNING COURSE  
RELEVANCE OF SOME REPRESENTATIONS OF  
WOMEN IN SOME MAHAYANA SUTRAS**

Introductory materials:

My stance as a scholar-practitioner, a Buddhist dharma teacher, and a retired university professor of comparative studies in religion, generalist rather than a specialist, and also a feminist.

My course at the Lotus Garden “shedra” Buddhist history for Buddhist practitioners--Practitioners of the kind who disparage “hinayana” and think the historical Buddha taught MY Buddhism.

**My conclusions: generalizations regarding gender and Buddhism in *Buddhism After Patriarchy* and other publications. Two statements sum it up very well:**

**What is commonly called “the view” is that gender is an appearance not a reality, that “enlightened mind is beyond gender, neither male nor female.”**

**Second, what we could call “the practice” is of institutional male dominance, which gives rise to a popular, but not normative view that it is definitely better or more fortunate to be reborn as a man than as a woman.**

**MOVING INTO SOME MY SUTRAS. In no particular order, especially not historical.**

**Regarding history, I have little to say except that I do not hold to the thesis that MY was a lay-led reform movement that elevated the status of women and the laity. I don't think one can argue that that the status of women is higher in MY Buddhism than in general, though one could claim that the imagination about women is more vivid than in other forms of Buddhism. That is important to my thesis that male supremacist gender norms have always been contested in Buddhism and by Buddhists.**

**A: prajnaparamita, especially in 8,000 lines.**

**Chap. 12 of verse summary “Conze’s translation.”lines  
253-7.**

**Then the prose hymn, chap. 7, section 1.**

B: the Sanskrit Mahaparinirvana sutra and its end also other statements.

C: The Pure Land sutras. The 35<sup>th</sup> vow, which is not in all versions of the sutra.

D: then there’s always the Lotus Sutra and the Dragon Girl.

First, the entourage

Second, the story of the eight year old dragon girl.

The Buddha predictions for Prajapati and Yashodara.

E: Everyone's favorite, the goddess in Vimalakirti sutra.  
Thurman's translation.

The sticky flowers: p. 58 just before the sex change modif.

The Goddess in Chap. 7.

**F: The Srimala sutra: about a woman who teaches with the lion's roar. Wayman's translation.**

**G: the Avatamsaka as a Buddhist Pilgrim's progress. And all the female Kalyamitras. Especially queen Maya, which is unusual.**

**Conclusions: The more abstract shastras have less to say about women or gender.**

The final conclusion. You can find whatever you want on gender in Buddhist texts. So in the long run one's Buddhist "view" is not dictated by the tradition but by one's own values and choices. Can't blame the tradition for making conservative or oppressive choices. There are other options. Present ethical choices are determined by present values, not old texts. The old texts are ambiguous and say many different things.