



The Buddha in the Machine: Art, Technology, and the Meeting of East and West (Yale Studies in English)

Prof. R. John Williams

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The famous 1893 Chicago World's Fair celebrated the dawn of corporate capitalism and a new Machine Age with an exhibit of the world's largest engine. Yet the noise was so great, visitors ran out of the Machinery Hall to retreat to the peace and quiet of the Japanese pavilion's Buddhist temples and lotus ponds. Thus began over a century of the West's turn toward an Asian aesthetic as an antidote to modern technology.

From the turn-of-the-century Columbian Exhibition to the latest Zen-inspired designs of Apple, Inc., R. John Williams charts the history of our embrace of Eastern ideals of beauty to counter our fear of the rise of modern technological systems. In a dazzling work of synthesis, Williams examines Asian influences on book design and department store marketing, the commercial fiction of Jack London, the poetic technique of Ezra Pound, the popularity of Charlie Chan movies, the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, and the design of the latest high-tech gadgets. Williams demonstrates how, rather than retreating from modernity, writers, artists, and inventors turned to traditional Eastern technê as a therapeutic means of living with—but never abandoning—Western technology.

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