

Vesna A. Wallace, ed.. *Buddhism in Mongolian History, Culture, and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. xxii + 325 pp. \$36.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-19-995866-5.

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Buddhism in Mongolian History, Culture, and Society examines some aspects of how Buddhism has adapted to Mongolian indigenous culture and society, and demonstrates the important stages in the building of a unique “Mongolian Buddhism” and Mongolian Buddhist identity. This volume provides readers with important evidence and ideas for understanding well the historical, cultural, and social context of Buddhism in the Mongolian world. Without a doubt, as a whole, this is an innovative and progressive work on the subject.

This book contains fifteen individual articles that focus on three major topics. The first group of articles addresses the religious and political activities of Mongolian Buddhist personages of the pre-revolutionary period. This includes chapters 1 to 5, by (respectively) Johan Elverskog, Richard Taupier, Baatr Kitinov, Matthew King, and Vesna A. Wallace, on what happened to Queen Jönggen; the western Mongolian Clear Script and the making of a Buddhist state; the last attempt to build the Buddhist state; modernities, sense making, and the inscription of Mongolian Buddhist place; and envisioning a Mongolian Buddhist identity through Chinggis Khan.

The second set of articles addresses strategies used to indigenize and popularize Buddhism in Mongolian society through religious, cultural, and artistic practices. This section features work by

Uranchimeg B. Ujeed, Uranchimeg Tsultemin (chapters 7 and 8), Simon Wickham-Smith, and Vesna A. Wallace (chapters 10 to 12) on the establishment of the Mergen tradition of Mongolian Buddhism; Vajrayāna and the state in medieval Mongolia; the power and authority of Maitreya in Mongolia; a literary history of Buddhism in Mongolia; how Vajrapāṇi became a Mongol; commonalities among protective deities, Mongolian heroes, and swift steeds; and Buddhist sacred mountains, auspicious landscapes, and their agency.

Finally, three articles cover the persecution and revitalization of Buddhism in modern Mongolian societies. These include Christopher Kaplonski, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, and Hürelbaatar Ujeed, on court cases against Buddhist monks in early socialist Mongolia; Buddhist women of Buryatia; and the social and cultural practice of Buddhism in the local context of Inner Mongolia in the first half of the twentieth century.

Buddhism has become a significant part of modern Mongolian culture. Its historical involvement in Mongolian society spans from the thirteenth century to the present day, and from the political sphere to the everyday lives of ordinary people. More significantly, it is still a crucial source of identity for many Mongolians, as it remains “Mongol” while they face new social and religious challenges in a rapidly transforming

world. One of the major contributions of this volume is that it pioneers a comprehensive exploration of Buddhism in Mongolia from multiple perspectives by specialists from different disciplines. The editor is correct to take a multidisciplinary approach to Buddhism in Mongolia and therefore succeeds in overcoming the difficulties in studying the intricate and dynamic Mongolian Buddhism. This is definitely a must-read book for beginners of Mongolian Buddhist studies and also makes for an easy read for the general public.

Since each article addresses different aspects of Buddhism in Mongolia, it is impossible here to outline all of the important studies found in the volume that could help better understand Mongolian Buddhism. Thus, as a legal historian, the reviewer will provide further discussion on two articles (chapters 13 and 12) involving the broader issue of “religion and justice,” to which the volume makes a significant contribution.

Christopher Kaplonski (chapter 13) describes how the socialist government of Mongolia employed legal courts as a strategic political means to destroy the power of high-ranking lamas in the 1930s. It is at first impressive that Kaplonski bases his arguments on criminal case records from 1938, which gave the reviewer a sense of high reliability. Using a legal system for political ends is probably not uncommon in history. The author seems to have been aware of the breadth of the issue, by comparing—not in detail but at a necessary level—the Mongolian case with those of contemporary Buryats and Jews. In this regard, it would have been more interesting if the author had mentioned the Inner Mongolian case in the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution in the People’s Republic of China. Furthermore, the reviewer would be interested in knowing whether the way in which lamas were excluded differed from that of non-lamas. The issue of genocide in Mongolia is also a concern for scholars of the Mongol Empire. Finally, it is worth noting that the use of a legal

system as political means frequently occurs in many countries, even today.

Another article closely relevant to the reviewer’s concerns is chapter 12, by Vesna A. Wallace. The author illustrates the Buddhist practices related to the natural world, both in the historical past and present-day Mongolia. It can thus be evaluated as one of the most representative articles of the volume, dealing with the relationship between Buddhism and Mongolian indigenous culture. An important fact described in this chapter is that both traditional and democratic Mongolian governments have officially recognized “sacred places” and support the practices of worshipping them. Such an official stance towards the natural world is, to my knowledge, quite rare in modern countries. However, some recent cases concerning natural resource development in Mongolia have created strong impressions that governmental or legal protection of the natural world is merely nominal or at least dysfunctional in practice. A practical question is, what would the government do if there was a sacred place found with abundant natural resources which would bring about enormous profits for the government? This reviewer would be interested in having an answer to this question.

Although, as the editor admits, it is impossible to address all relevant topics of Buddhism in a single volume, it is necessary not to neglect the rapid revival of modern-day shamanism if we are to properly understand the interaction between Buddhism and shamanism. As many have already observed, shamanism, the Mongolian indigenous “religion” which had long been suppressed by the Buddhist and communist states, is rapidly being revived, not only in Mongolia but also in Buryatia and Inner Mongolia. This movement seems to have made the relationship between Buddhism and shamanism more complex than it has ever been. Partly relevant to this issue, another shortcoming of this volume is the scarcity of new information on present-day local practices of Bud-

dhism, or religion broadly, in the Mongolian world. Fieldwork-based anthropological and sociological research on the subject is urgently needed.

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