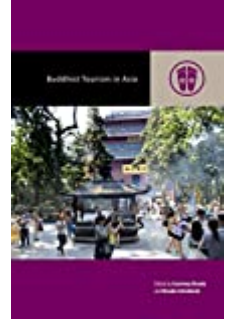


Courtney Bruntz, Brooke Schedneck, eds. *Buddhist Tourism in Asia*. Contemporary Buddhism. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020. 266 pp. \$68.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8248-8118-4.



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Whereas the tourist generally hurries back home at the end of a few weeks or months, the traveler belonging no more to one place than to the next, moves slowly over periods of years, from one part of the earth to another. Indeed, he would have found it difficult to tell, among the many places he had lived, precisely where it was he had felt most at home.... [A]nother important difference between tourist and traveler is that the former accepts his own civilization without question; not so the traveler, who compares it with the others, and rejects those elements he finds not to his liking.

— Paul Bowles, [The Sheltering Sky](#)

It seems strange to review a book on Buddhist tourism in Asia during a global pandemic when the tourist industry has been eviscerated across the continent, hundreds of thousands of people have died, and visa/travel restrictions are still in place. However, this review is hopeful for a brighter future and a return to travel across the region and beyond. Courtney Bruntz and Brooke Schedneck's new edited volume, *Buddhist Tourism in Asia*, is a

welcome addition to the growing number of studies of modern Buddhism. While the distinctions between travelers and tourists are not fully addressed in the introduction as Paul Bowles would have liked, the well-researched and comprehensive articles by some of the most well-respected scholars in the field offer much information on Buddhist tourist sites in Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand (it would have been nice to have Bhutan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, South Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, and Taiwan, but any editor of a collected volume knows how difficult it is to find timely and qualified scholars on all the subjects one wants to include). It also contains theoretical reflections on secularism, commodification, pilgrimage, and modernity. While not particularly innovative in terms of its theoretical contributions, it is an excellent introduction to the subject for students and scholars entering the field or looking to expand the material used in courses on Buddhist modernism, globalization, economics, and demographics. Moreover, the bibliography and secondary sources

are thorough. It is disappointing that images were not included in the book as the reader would want to see some of the fantastical and visually stunning tourist sites described. Still, there is no other book that covers such a wide range of tourist sites in such an accessible and useful manner.

The introduction by Bruntz and Schedneck is clear and concise. The book is light on theoretical engagements, but the editors do provide a good literature review of major scholars (in English) of tourist studies and religion. They also provide an excellent set of resources for further reading. The first section of the introduction relates Buddhism to tourism and pilgrimage studies. The only problem in this section relates to the following statement: "Through efforts of Buddhist place-making, which utilize global and domestic imaginaries of Buddhism, Buddhists creatively engage with modernity, including processes of secularization and commodification" (p. 2). I would have liked to have seen some acknowledgment that this process is not modern at all in Asia. Buddhist sites throughout Asia have been deeply connected to commerce and nonreligious activity for centuries, and some historical examples of these interactions would have been helpful. It would have been nice to see a greater reflection here on the legacy of Victor Turner's work on pilgrimage (mentioned on p. 3) and performance as well. In the next section of the introduction, the focus turns to "imaginaries and place-making." Bruntz and Schedneck's use of Maria Gravari-Barbas and Nelson H. Graburn's work here is very appropriate; however, while mentioned, Benedict Anderson and Steven Collins's different approaches are not interrogated and the reader is left with much name-dropping of well-known studies, but no questioning of their ideas. I would have liked to see some more sophisticated theoretical wrestling here as in other places in the introduction. I imagine that the editors saw their contributors working on these issues in their individual chapters and this book does provide forums for critical debate spread across the eleven chapters, but sustained attention to these perenni-

ally important topics in the field would have been better. I would call the reader's attention to John Miksic and Justin Ritzinger's chapters especially here.

The two subsequent sections of the introduction are called "secularizing the sacred" and "commodification and its consequences." They mention Jose Casanova's excellent work and show the danger of ideas of secularity being connected to Christianity and suggest that perhaps the binary between the religious and the secular is not as useful here. Indeed, I found that most of the chapters in this volume question the usefulness of the term secular, and therefore wondered why there was not a more thorough engagement with Talal Asad's work here. The editors are certainly correct to write that "secularization is not ... a uniform process, and for some Buddhists, processes of secularization are not felt as encroachment but rather as opportunities for internationalization, missionization, and/or modernization" (p. 11). Later they also point out that "Buddhists often view secularization as a resource for reinventing practices and spaces in order to attract diverse travelers and retain religion's relevancy. Such changes do not, of course, occur without contestation, and the development of Buddhist sites by non-Buddhist organizations has been a source of controversy" (p. 13). Chapters 5 through 8, by John Marston and Matthew Trew on Cambodia, Bruntz herself on China, and Ian Reader on Japan, focus on these issues well.

The section on commodification is more general and it is hard to determine where the editors stand on the issue. While they cite the relevant studies, they do not seriously confront the issue. However, as they point out, Elizabeth Williams-Oerberg's excellent case study of Ladakh, India, presses the reader to see the differences between consumerism and commodification. The editors do point out that Buddhist sites can have their own internal economies, including, quite importantly, the "economy of merit" and emphasize to their credit that "Buddhist sites have always been a part

of surrounding market economies with inns housing pilgrims along their journeys, teahouses providing sustenance, and shops ensuring travelers the ability to find clothing and other necessities” (p. 16).

The individual chapters, while not covering many huge tourist sites in Buddhist Asia, do offer insight into some stunning examples of major Buddhist monuments, museums, and tourist spectacle attractions. David Geary’s work on Bodhi Gaya (India) which was the subject of his groundbreaking 2017 book, *The Rebirth of Bodhi Gaya: Buddhism and the Making of a World Heritage Site*, shows both the local and international impact of the site of the Buddha’s awakening. John Miksic looks closely at the Tiger Balm Gardens in Singapore, a site dear to my heart and included in my *Architects of Buddhist Leisure* (2018). He also offers an interesting comparative study of this twentieth-century tourist site with Angkor Wat and Borobodur. What I found particularly provocative about his chapter is when he calls our attention to what “is not included” in these sites (p. 47). He shows the power tourist sites have to emphasize and de-emphasize aspects of Buddhist history and literature through material and visual display for tourists. Brooke Schedneck’s contribution is thoroughly researched and very useful. It comes partially out of the years of research she engaged with in writing her recent book, *Religious Tourism in Northern Thailand* (2021, highly recommended).

Turning to China (the subject of three of the eleven chapters), Justin Ritzinger looks at the ways in which the Chinese government is “officially canoniz[ing] a mountain” to establish a sacred site dedicated to the future Buddha Maitreya (p. 85). His study is a masterful example of the study of modern Chinese economics and domestic tourist infrastructure investment, looking at Mount Xuedon and Mount Fanjing. Courtney Bruntz and Brian Nichols also describe sites in China and conducted interviews with many monks at various sites throughout the country. The latter looks specific-

ally at monasteries as tourist sites and the difficulties monks face in trying to maintain peaceful and quiet sites for meditation and ritual while contending with crowds of tourists. The former looks at the ways monastic buildings are renovated through tourist income, but also shows the downside of this development. Her examination of Famen Temple (outside Xian) offers insights into the pressures faced and opportunities afforded a modern Chinese monastery promoted by the government for economic and tourist development.

Matthew Trew and John Marston offer very different studies of Cambodian Buddhist sites. Marston looks at pilgrimage groups that come to Cambodia from Sri Lanka and India. He offers a rare example of inner-Asian Buddhist tourism compared to other studies that largely look at domestic tourism or European tourism to Buddhist Asia. Trew looks closely at Phnom Sampeau. He shows the complexity of the tourist “imaginaries” that play out in particular ways in Cambodia because of the almost schizophrenic draw of tourists to sites of both genocidal atrocities and magnificent Angkorian architecture. He writes, “both domestic and foreign imaginaries of Buddhism are powerful motivators for inspiring travel to Buddhist sites.... [I]n Cambodia, tourist imaginaries often involve perceptions of oft-exoticized spirituality, the legacies of a violent past, and the beauty of the natural environment in creating a narrative foundation for tourism” (p. 126).

Besides the aforementioned work on Ladakh by Williams-Oerberg, the remaining two chapters, by Matthew Mitchell and Ian Reader, are dedicated to Japan. Reader is one of the most seasoned and skilled theorists on pilgrimage in Buddhist studies and has many publications on the subject. Therefore, his chapter, which looks at Eihei-ji, Koyasan, and Shikoku, is an ideal general introduction for students to see the complexities of modern Buddhist tourism. Mitchell’s study is very different in scale and focus. He offers a surprising study of “speed dating” and romantic matchmaking

centered at Buddhist sites that are being “sold as locations valuable for finding love” (p. 207).

As you can see, Bruntz and Schedneck have offered the reader a wide-ranging set of studies that explore how entrepreneurs, governmental tourist ministries, and private travel and leisure companies are working with, struggling with, exploiting, promoting, and learning from Buddhist nuns and monks across Asia. My hopes are that a second volume would incorporate examples from other sites in Asia and expand the theoretical questions that could be generated by these sites. However, instead of criticizing the book that isn't here, let me end by praising the book that is. It is a useful and thought-provoking, complex yet accessible, and clearly organized introduction to major part of modern Buddhist life.

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