

artefacts from the context of local ritual economies to that of international connoisseurship, market value and gallery display. Indeed, part of the challenge of thinking historically about these wonderful objects is to understand that the decline of indigenous religious belief and practice in the second half of the twentieth century has meant that many artefacts – figurative shrine sculptures more than masks – are now as out of context locally as they are in Western galleries and loft apartments. As Fardon notes with regard to Chamba wooden figures, contemplating such sculptures in the rarefied atmosphere of Western museums is a strikingly different experience to that of the dazed and awestruck encounter experienced by young men being initiated into the world of historic Chamba religion – a world now in rapid retreat.

This book is a landmark in the history of African visual and material culture.

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GENERAL

JOHN S. HARDING (ed.):

Studying Buddhism in Practice.

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This volume, edited by John Harding (with added words by Hillary Rodrigues, the series editor) is dedicated to the legacy of William R. LaFleur who passed away unexpectedly before finishing his chapter intended for the book: thus, a special article is added compiled from LaFleur's earlier notes describing his personal journey into the study of Buddhism. There are eleven further contributors to the volume of whom four focus on Japan as a field of research. Other contributors have conducted research in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, India, Thailand, and also in Buddhist communities in North America, making for wide coverage and an interesting contribution to the study of Buddhism in practice.

John Holt takes us back to his early experience in Sri Lanka and gives an account of how social change has affected the pilgrimage site of the Tooth-Relic Temple in Kandy. He asserts that a Buddhist ethos remains fundamental to shaping people's identities, rooting them in their particular religious discourses despite the development of local economies and increasing secularization. The Buddha is seen not only as an object of veneration, but as a kind of "polestar", defining character and guiding people through major transformations in their lives. John Harding, by contrast, looks at the seemingly "uninterrupted" tradition of Shikoku pilgrimage. He compares current cultural markers with older pilgrimage patterns to find out what has been modified along the pilgrimage route as a result of Buddhist persecution in modern Japanese history.

Most authors present their self-reflexive accounts by conducting empirical research, but Lina Verchery goes further and examines her role as documentary film maker in representing factual reality. Her film describes the annual lobster-releasing ceremony organized by a remote Buddhist monastery in Nova Scotia, and touches on the issue of how to represent "reality" and create an emotional

connection to the documented events for those who are not familiar with the religious context. Mavis Fenn describes her experience of participant observation and interviewing informants in a Buddhist temple in Ontario. The tension she describes derives from the difference in approaches between being trained as a textual scholar and socio-anthropology that focuses on living Buddhist practices. Monica Lindberg Falk discusses research techniques in interviewing traumatized victims as she examines the recovery process in Phang Nga province in southern Thailand which was devastated by the Asian tsunami in 2004. She explains how Buddhist concepts such as karma and merit help people make sense of the major tragedy befalling them, and how communal ritual allows them to come to terms with the consequences of encountering life and death. Jason Danely talks about the importance of “chance encounters” in research and remaining open to them, such as when he encountered Jizo, a popular Bodhisattva in Japan, which brought him valuable insights into understanding generational life cycle rites.

Rita Langer describes the significance of communal occasions, such as feeding and alms-giving in Buddhist funerals, which foster reciprocal relationships between people in the community, recreating the connection between this-world and the other-world. She emphasizes the importance of understanding reciprocal commensality that has been neglected in Buddhist studies. Paul Crowe also points to the importance of understanding communal practices from his experience of taking part in a ritual celebration of Amitābha Buddha’s birthday at a Chinese Buddhist temple in Vancouver. He reminds us, however, of the difficulty in finding a balance between being an objective observer and simply being there to experience the effectiveness of ritual.

Alexander Soucy’s article is one of the few that articulates the issue of gender and examines how family structures affect women’s religious practices. He describes how Buddhism in Vietnam has been affected by its modern reform movement and the Communist takeover in the 1950s. As a result, devotional activities and chanting sutras have come to be devalued as feminine practices, in contrast to a “masculine view of Buddhism” that has taken on a more rational and doctrinal understanding of Buddhism with an emphasis on self-cultivation.

Most of the contributors describe their first-hand experiences of Buddhism in practice through ritual participation. Pamela Winfield attended a lay initiation into the Diamond World *maṇḍala* and underwent ritual coronation at Kōyasan in Japan. The main focus of her argument, however, is on the historical treatment of Buddhism in protecting homeland security and promoting the wellbeing of the country. James Apple describes his participation in a Tibetan Buddhist ritual in a rural village near Bodh Gayā, associated with the legend of Sujātā, while Clark Chilson reveals his participation in a secretive Shin Buddhist group in Kyoto where he experiences how a sermon is effectively communicated. Through ritual participation, both engage with theoretical issues in the study of religion; Apple draws from J. Z. Smith’s analysis and introduces the insider-outsider problem while Chilson follows the ideas in Schechner’s performance studies, describing the sermon as a pedagogical performance in which actions and words complement each other.

At first glance, the volume gives an impression of cobbling together a wide range of themes and experiences from different parts of the world under the banner of Buddhism in practice. The majority of the contributors are trained in textual, philosophical or historical disciplines, so they generally appear unfamiliar with empirical research methods. Few have touched on the essential aspect of Buddhism as a “living faith” and explored the informants’ religious experiences or beliefs. However, the tension deriving from their subjective experiences and the need to interpret

and make sense of them has allowed the reader to sympathize with their ordeal of being a participant observer in unfamiliar religious contexts. The volume would have benefited, however, if the number of contributors had been limited to allow each more space to develop their ideas with regard to Buddhism as a living faith and reveal what is truly meant by Buddhism in practice.

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