

**Trine Brox and Elizabeth Williams-Oerberg, eds., *Buddhism and Business: Merit, Material Wealth, and Morality in the Global Market Economy***

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As Trine Brox and Elizabeth Williams-Oerberg, the editors of *Buddhism and Business: Merit, Material Wealth, and Morality in the Global Market Economy*, rightly note, economics and economic concerns have been part of Buddhism since its inception but are an area long neglected in the Buddhist studies scholarship. This edited volume is a welcome contribution to this burgeoning area. Although the title implies a primary engagement with business, the book instead unites around a common interest in “Buddhism and Buddhists in the global market economy” (1). As such, *Buddhism and Business* does not address “Buddhist economics,” which attempts to apply Buddhist ethics to economic practices. Rather, it is an ethnographically derived analysis of how Buddhists and Buddhism already engage with contemporary economies and markets, aligning itself with the scholarship on Buddhist lived religion that challenges the ascetic and anti-materialistic images of Buddhism. While acknowledging the historical relationship between Buddhism and economies, the editors and contributors build from the conviction that the particulars of “second” or “late” modernity present unique forms of engagement and challenges due to the spread of neoliberal economic policies that focus on individuals and their self-improvement in relation to markets.

Jane Cagle’s contribution orients readers toward two key ideas within Buddhist forms of economy, merit and *dāna*, that are particularly helpful for non-Buddhist experts.

She argues that the seeming contradictions concerning Tibetan monastic wealth are addressed through far-reaching redistribution networks focused on wealth's relationship with virtue and concepts of asceticism. Wealth becomes a marker of holiness; the holier the monk, the more wealth he accumulates. In turn, monastics are expected to use most of it for purposes deemed to be Buddhist, for example building a temple rather than buying an expensive car. Tibetan spiritual leaders' performative use of wealth can further elevate or condemn them within the broader community.

The following three ethnographic chapters examine the interconnection of spiritual and material wealth. Continuing Caple's considerations of Tibetan Buddhism, Dan Smyer Yü introduces "constellative Buddhism" to characterize relationships between Tibetan lamas and their Han Chinese followers as a network radiating out from the guiding start of the lama himself. Moving to Japan, Jørn Borup draws from Christian prosperity theology to consider the "prosperity Buddhism" of Japanese new religious movements, which utilizes both soft prosperity, focused on voluntary and missionary work, and hard prosperity, which embraces wealth itself as a virtue. Levi McLaughlin then concentrates on the Japanese new religious movement Soka Gakkai to argue for attending to affective worth in addition to market worth, especially when considering women who are often excluded in discussions of economy.

Moving out of Asia to find Buddhism in diaspora is Mariann Vittrup Hedegaard's standout contribution concerning the labor of mindfulness. Through an ethnography of a Danish greenhouse worker, Hedegaard uses the metaphor of a greenhouse to illustrate the labor of mindfulness: it appears and strives to be natural but requires copious effort and labor. Hedegaard elucidates the challenges of naturalizing the affective labor of mindfulness, which can delegitimize natural responses to situations (like anger at exploitation) and turn an inability to maintain a mindful state into a moral failure, compounding detrimental effects to the laborer.

Buddhism becomes more abstracted in the subsequent two chapters that address the commodification of "Buddhism" as an entity. Inken Prohl uses Buddhism to consider branding as religion. Buddhism becomes her ideal case study because of its contemporary image that relies on tropes of "truth, well-being, and happiness" (122), matching with neoliberal ideas of self-reliance and satisfaction. Through the concept of "triple religion," Prohl draws on religious semantics, popular religion, and branding imbued with religion to argue that religion is ever-present, even as it seems to disappear in today's supposedly secularized world. An excellent complement to Prohl is Michael Jerryson's account of a Thai Buddhist organization's attempts to police the use of Buddhist images in ways they consider "blasphemy." Grounded in Buddhist texts that confirm the historical presence of blasphemy within Buddhism, Jerryson turns to ethnographic data with the Knowing Buddha Organization to illustrate how Buddhists have been successful (and not) in their attempts to sacralize images of the Buddha around the world.

The book concludes with an adroit wider reflection from Lionel Obadia on Buddhism's place in the global economy. Positioned as friendly to modernity and the environment, Buddhism is somewhat unique among the world religions in its largely worldwide appeal, which manifests in four ways: Buddhism as a commodity on the market of global religions; Buddhist groups as enterprises that offer products in a competitive religious market; Buddhist spiritual commodities available for consumption; and Buddhism itself as a kind of spiritual capitalism that relies on the market of karma for rebirth.

As these chapter summaries can attest, *Buddhism and Business* contains a dizzying array of contributions, but they logically flow from one chapter to the next. The book articulates important Asian and non-Asian Buddhist experiences alongside compelling conceptual work about what “Buddhism” means within the global market economy. At the same time, the relative brevity of the work at a brisk 160 pages feels as though it would have been served by a few additional chapters. Additionally, the contributors at times seem overly intent on creating new terms of analysis rather than fully supporting the proposed terms’ relevance and usefulness. More data overall would have been helpful in clarifying and establishing these insightful terms, especially for more widespread application.

Nevertheless, *Buddhism and Business* does justice to the extreme breadth of the topics within this emerging field. Most chapters would be helpful resources in undergraduate or graduate classrooms, especially the introduction and those by Hedegaard, Jerryson, and Obadia. The book’s appeal is not limited to those within Buddhist studies, and there is enough contextualization of terms and concepts that scholars without much prior knowledge of Buddhism from a variety of disciplines would find accessible and applicable materials. Brox and Williams-Oerberg have published an excellent book that will help push forward discussions of the relationships between Buddhism, the global market economy, and the world.

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