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*Buddhism and the Dynamics of Transculturality, New Approaches*

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*Buddhism and the Dynamics of Transculturality* discusses Buddhism's involvement in cultural exchange and transfer. It focuses on cultural mobility, the domestication of ideas and practices in new environments, and the consequent production of Buddhist histories. Within this framework, the volume presents a variety of perspectives on what has been termed 'transculturality'. This is used as an orienting concept, leaving ample space for discussion and multiple interpretations, as explained in the well-written introduction. All of the contributors make full use of the freedom they have been given, bringing intriguing new facts and theories to the subject. The end result is an interesting array of papers exploring Buddhist practice, discourse, and visual and material culture across a wide range of geographical and temporal contexts.

The first chapter, by Ingo Strauch, addresses the role of trade contacts in the dissemination of Buddhism in the rarely studied Socotra archipelago (modern-day Yemen). This fascinating, beautifully illustrated study is based on a recently discovered cave hoard of drawings and inscriptions in a variety of languages and scripts dating from the second to the fourth or fifth century CE. Alongside brief devotional texts, drawings of *stūpas*, possible markers of worship generating merit, testify to the importance of Buddhism in the archipelago. Due to a lack of local economic support, however, permanent Buddhist settlements were not established there.

Equally intriguing – and just as well illustrated – is Anna Filigenzi's contribution, which focuses on decidedly non-Buddhist customs in the art of Gandhāra (particularly Swat, ancient Uḍḍiyāna), including scenes of drinking, dancing, and even eroticism. At first glance, such images seem jarringly incongruous, especially as they are often presented in close proximity to Buddhist iconography. However, by exploring both the possible foreign origins of the customs and the local setting, Filigenzi highlights the crucial importance of context and explains that the people of Uḍḍiyāna embraced a wide variety of religious traditions. The visual borrowing of 'Dionysiac' scenes is testament to this diversity and provides a tantalizing glimpse into the role of religion in important life events.

The third chapter, by Toru Funayama, shifts the focus to China in order to discuss the ways in which Indic Buddhist terms were rendered into Chinese. As Funayama points out, translators had to find a way to make Buddhist texts comprehensible to a Chinese audience, even though many words and phrases were close to untranslatable on account of profound cultural differences between China and India. In this context, the translators often used words that had broadly similar connotations but did not precisely correspond to the original Indic terms. For instance, *ārya* ('holy one/saint': that is, one who has attained a higher state of mind) was routinely translated as the culturally loaded term *sheng* ('sage', in a variety of senses). In his reflections on this approach, Funayama suggests that, although the translators certainly made the texts more accessible, they also increased the risk of widespread misinterpretation of a number of crucial Buddhist concepts.

In the next chapter, Lothar Ledderose discusses a stone hymn that served as the colophon to a Buddhist *sūtra* engraved on a granite slab on Mount Tie in Shandong Province in 579 (illustrations are provided). In addition to translating and explaining the content of the hymn, Ledderose provides a brief overview of previous studies that date back to the eighteenth century. This serves as a welcome reminder of how researchers' focus can shift over time, as the early Chinese scholars were more interested in the calligraphic quality of the inscription, rather than its content.

In Chapter Five, we move to the Japanese cultic site of Mount Asama (near present-day Toba), where a number of religious groups' ritual practices are associated with high-level political narratives and disputes. Anna Andreeva's rich and detailed contribution explains how, on the one hand, long-term transcultural movements are localized and become crucial aspects of a site's cultural memory, and, on the other hand, how religion and (socio)politics engage in perpetual battles over ritual influence and economic resources.

In the next chapter, Fabio Rambelli explores the origins of Buddhism in early modern Japan. As the author explains in his lavishly illustrated chapter, while the Japanese initially relied on Chinese accounts of India, from the seventeenth century onwards much of their information came from European sources, and this change in perspective had a deep impact on the country's perception of the subcontinent and its traditions.

Davide Torri's focus is on the dynamics of cultural production in Nepal's Helambu valley – another highly original topic. His chapter is based on fieldwork conducted with the Hyolmo, a Nepalese minority of Tibetan origin, and their veneration of reincarnated lamas and treasure discoverers. Torri meticulously explains how this is intimately connected to

conceptions of the geographical–religious landscape and to the Hyolmo’s identity-construction and position in wider Nepalese society.

The volume concludes with two chapters of more general reflections, each involving Tibet. The first of these, by Markus Viehbeck, discusses the term ‘Indo-Tibetan Buddhism’ from the perspective of Tibetan polemical discourses. This stimulating contribution adroitly explores how and why Tibetan scholastics and contemporary scholars have struggled with the Indo-Tibetan concept, which has invariably and inevitably played a significant role in the construction of Buddhist identities in Tibet.

Finally, Jonathan Samuels invites readers to revisit the emic perspective within the Tibetan cultural context. Using the distinction between the worldly and the otherworldly as a kind of test case, he warns against oversimplification, artificiality, and even the distortion of cultural features.

Samuels’ reflections serve as the perfect conclusion to this rather disparate collection of thought-provoking contributions. No attempt is made to mould all of the papers into a single overarching theory, but that is the book’s principal strength as the breadth of approaches and range of topics will undoubtedly inspire future researchers to investigate other currently underexplored aspects of transculturality.