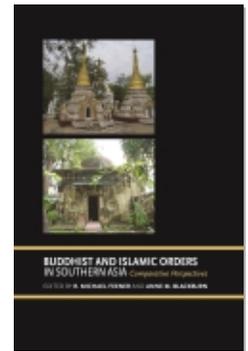




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Buddhist and Islamic Orders in Southern Asia

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PREFACE

Recent work on religion and society in Southern Asia has highlighted the dynamic ways in which translocal traditions move across and take root in the region's diverse cultural contexts. These broad dynamics have been of interest to historians of both Buddhism and Islam, producing work that has explored different aspects of the networks linking coreligionists across premodern Southern Asia. Despite shared academic interests, researchers working in these two distinct subfields of the history of religions have rarely engaged each other in a focused or sustained way. Although scholars of both Buddhist studies and Islamic studies share interests in similar processes and focus on contexts that overlap in terms of both periodization and geography, little has been done to share investigative approaches and methods of interpretation.

There is, however, much that scholars working in these two fields could learn from each other to support our evolving understandings of the circulation and localization of religious traditions. For example, historians of Muslim societies can benefit from recent work in Buddhist studies on aspects of material culture as well as from perspectives on dimensions of ritual practice that stretch beyond canonical literature and narrowly doctrinal definitions of the tradition. Approaches that direct attention toward the intentionality of participants in localized forms of devotion and that examine where protective and/or salvific power is attributed by practitioners can and should stimulate new thinking about the diverse modes of Muslim ritual practice in Southern Asia. Likewise, scholars of Buddhism could learn from their colleagues in Islamic studies who have been developing models of circulation and connected histories, bringing into view transregional dimensions of institutional and intellectual history. Moreover, studies of Islam in Southern Asia offer thought-provoking treatments of smaller-scale contexts of reception and localization. Working together, scholars of Islam and Buddhism can develop more nuanced and integrated analytical frameworks for conceptualizing the coproduction of polity, ritual forms, intellectual currents, and material cultures.

To facilitate such work, we must first create spaces for constructive engagement between the fields of Islamic and Buddhist studies. This volume aims to create one such space by drawing analytic perspectives developed by both fields

into discussions of one major dimension of the history of religion in Southern Asia. The focus is on “religious orders”—conceptualized here as a comparative category for discussion of Sufi brotherhoods and Buddhist monastic and ritual lineages. Both Buddhism and Islam historically developed institutional mechanisms that facilitated the expansion and maintenance of liturgical, literary, and clerical/ritual specialist connections. These were important factors in the historical development of both traditions—particularly during the period from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries.

This volume brings together contributions by scholars engaged in cutting-edge work in the study of Islam and Buddhism in Southern Asia in conversation about the ways in which “orders” have functioned within these two traditions to expand and sustain transregional religious networks. Orders have presented particular traditions and their human representatives as attractive and authoritative, and have established means by which far-flung local communities could come to be recognized and engaged with as part of a broader world of coreligionists. This volume opens new spaces of creative interaction between scholars in both fields in order to develop a better understanding of the complex roles played by religious networks in the history of Southern Asia.

This book is the fruit of exchanges launched at the conference “Orders and Itineraries: Comparative Religious Networks in Southern Asia,” convened on February 21 to 22, 2013, at the National University of Singapore’s Asia Research Institute. We are immensely grateful for the generous support of the institute and its staff, and especially to Valerie Yeo for her outstanding work in organizing the event. We would also like to extend our thanks to all those who joined the discussions in Singapore and shared their thoughts, especially to Prasenjit Duara, Rick Weiss, Nola Cooke, Ramani Hettiarachchi, Iain Sinclair, Gerrit de Vylder, Ines Zupanov, Oona Paredes, Lim Peng Han, Carolina Dionco, Masao Imamura, and Andrea Acri. We are also grateful to Adora Elisapeta Jones for her kind assistance with copyediting and formatting the final manuscript for publication.