

*Buddhism and Ireland: From the Celts to the Counter-culture and Beyond*, by Laurence Cox. Sheffield: Equinox. 2013. 426pp, 35 figures. Hb £65.00/\$99.95, ISBN-13: 9781908049292. Pb £24.99/\$35, ISBN-13: 9781908049308.

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### Keywords

Buddhism in the West, religion in Ireland, sociology of religion

Scholars of Buddhist studies generally focus their research on a specific time period, a specific movement, or even a specific text; a work like *Buddhism and Ireland: From the Celts to the Counter-culture and Beyond*, therefore, is particularly interesting as it puts two large, historically-shifting concepts in direct conversation with each other. Cox is quick to complicate these two concepts, however, demonstrating that Irish Buddhists were not always in Ireland and that Ireland's Buddhism was not always classically Buddhist, nor did it desire to be. Through this detailed, historical analysis, Cox challenges Buddhist studies' narratives about the introduction of Buddhism to the western world, the traditional patterns of western conversion, and the significance of individual interactions with Buddhism, to reveal the importance of Ireland's specific ethno-religious history and global peripheral status in understanding its place in the Buddhist world.

Cox's work is divided into three sections, which trace Ireland's knowledge of and interaction with Buddhism diachronically. Part I is the shortest section, but also covers the longest historical time — from 500 to 1850 CE. Here, Cox examines travellers' tales, received histories, and legends to demonstrate that, contrary to popular belief, Ireland and other countries of medieval Europe were not ignorant of Buddhism prior to the twentieth century, but rather had a rich and at times even nuanced understanding of Buddhist doctrine. This understanding arose primarily from two separate circuits of knowledge — the Irish Catholic circuit produced largely through missionary work, and the Anglo-Irish circuit produced through Ireland's participation in the management of Britain's Empire — which Cox explores in detail in the first chapter of Part II. From this chapter on, Part II continues its look at the first concrete interactions between Ireland and Buddhism in the second half of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth, examining the role of Irish Theosophy in challenging imperial narratives, and the first Irish Buddhists. Cox demonstrates that these initial Irish Buddhists — including Captain Charles Pfoundes, Lafcadio Hearn, and Michael Dillon among others — could only become Buddhist by leaving the constrictive culture of religiously-nationalized Ireland. Part III moves the historical narrative to recent history, examining not only Irish Buddhism's links with the counter-culture, which challenged Catholic hegemony, but also the hesitancy of many Irish Buddhists to express their religious identity publicly. The cultural shifts of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s opened the door for a more openly-acknowledged Irish

Buddhism in the twenty-first century, but Cox again demonstrates how models of western Buddhism as 'import', 'export', or 'baggage', developed by Thomas Tweed and others, are problematic tools to examine Ireland's acceptance of Buddhism.

In its challenge to the prevailing narratives of the West's adoption of Buddhism based largely on studies of British and American materials, *Buddhism and Ireland* is a welcome book. Cox demonstrates that Ireland, due to its peripheral nature and the hegemonic culture which closely tied social and political identity to religious affiliation, did not adopt Buddhism in the same manner as America or Britain; rather, to be an Irish Buddhist in the early twentieth century, most Buddhists had to leave Ireland and 'go native' in Asian societies, often becoming involved in counter-imperial and counter-missionary movements. Cox's fieldwork demonstrates that this trend even continued into the 1970s and 80s, when Irish Buddhists were still largely considered unacceptable by Irish society. Particularly useful from a theoretical perspective is the concept of 'Dissident Orientalism', which Cox creates to discuss how many Irish thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries used their affinity for Buddhism — and Asia more generally — to challenge social situations in their home countries. Often these 'Dissident Orientalists' were poor, working-class Irish, who were conscripted by the British Empire to work in Asia, a fact which again puts the Irish adoption of Buddhism in contradistinction to the American situation.

In order to cover such an incredible breadth of material, however, *Buddhism and Ireland* must necessarily change topic frequently, producing a work which at times seems confusing and choppy to the reader. Cox attempts to correct this by using sociological and Marxist theory to underlie and connect the discussion, but the wealth of theory at times works against him to obscure the argument. He does not utilize the classical theorists of religious studies, and this may alienate some more traditional scholars of religion and classical Buddhism, though the reader gains much through witnessing the use of sociological theory to analyze Buddhism. Despite not relying on some of the foundational theory of classical Buddhist studies, however, Cox introduces new methodological techniques that could be of great benefit to scholars of Buddhism — new not to sociologists, but perhaps to most Buddhologists — including examining census and household data and seeking out family historians to understand the lives of particular Buddhists.

*Buddhism and Ireland* would augment any course on western Buddhism, particularly as a final reading assignment to demonstrate that the West's adoption of Buddhism is more complicated than American and British narratives might suggest. Chapter Five's detailed examination of early Irish Buddhists who lived exciting, adventurous lives in Asia would offer a particularly compelling read for an undergraduate seminar. A graduate or undergraduate course on the connections between religion and larger social movements would also benefit from the latter sections of this book, specifically to explore how alternative religions and new religious movements operate in societies largely organized by a hegemonic, all-encompassing religious identity and how an alternative religious identity often serves as a means to critique the larger society itself. Cox's concept of 'Dissident Orientalism' in particular is an exciting theoretical tool which has significant potential to enrich the conversations surrounding a variety of historical and contemporary cases of Buddhist conversion and affiliation.