




Chinese Buddhism in Globalization: State, Communities, and Practices of Religion
Seminar Series, Religions in Globalization Webinar 8

**Gems of the Past, Seeds of the Future: Civilization,
Nationalism, and the Politics of India's Buddhist Heritage**

Douglas Ober
Visiting Assistant Professor in History, Fort Lewis College

Tuesday, January 9, 2024 at 21:00 - 22:15 (Japan Standard Time)



We invite you to participate in the eighth webinar of the online seminar series “Religions in Globalization,” which is part of the project “Chinese Buddhism in Globalization: States, Communities, and Practices of Religion.” The project is funded by the Henry Luce Foundation and based at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), Tokyo. For more information about the project, please visit the project website at: <https://cbg-project.com>

To participate please register online at: <https://forms.gle/915MbHmziY6x5bWq6>

Please register by **January 7**. We will send you the Zoom link the day before the webinar.

Webinar starting time in other time zones:

- Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) 12:00
- US, New York (EST) 7:00
- Europe (CET) 13:00
- HK, Singapore, Taiwan 20:00
- Australia, Canberra 23:00

Sincerely,
Yoshiko Ashiwa (Project PI), GRIPS
David Wank (Project Co-PI), Oriental Library



Title: Gems of the Past, Seeds of the Future: Civilization, Nationalism, and the Politics of India's Buddhist Heritage

Speaker: Douglas Ober, Assistant Visiting Professor in History, Fort Lewis College

Time: Thursday, January 9, 2024 at 21:00 - 22:15 (Japan Standard Time)

Talk Abstract:

Since becoming India's Prime Minister in 2014, Narendra Modi has attempted to court the Buddhist world by participating in ritual ceremonies and celebrations, promising to develop Buddhist pilgrimage sites and monuments, invoking India as a homeland for Buddhists, and declaring Buddhism to be the "final path" for humanity. While numerous journalists, political pundits, and scholars have argued that these assertions are the beginning of a "new era in India's faith-based cultural diplomacy," a closer investigation of the historical archives indicates otherwise. Far from being a rigid break with the past, Modi's uses of Buddhism are part of a long-standing nationalist project to foster cultural goodwill and economic relations between India and the Buddhist world. In this talk, I will provide a historical sketch of the modern uses of Buddhism as a diplomatic tool and instrument for nation-building by Indian nationalist leaders from the colonial period up through the present. Special attention will be paid to the first decade after Indian Independence in 1947, a period of time that best parallels and explains Modi's current promotion of Buddhism.

Speaker Bio:

Douglas Ober is Visiting Assistant Professor in History at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado and Honorary Research Associate, Centre for India and South Asia Research, University of British Columbia. He is an historian of South Asia, Buddhism, and colonialism and his work has appeared in the journals *Modern Asian Studies*, *Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, *Contemporary Buddhism*, and *South Asian History and Culture*, among others. His first book, *Dust on the Throne: The Search for Buddhism in Modern India*, was co-published in 2023 by Stanford University Press and Navayana Publishing. It reconstructs the history of Buddhism's decline, re-discovery and revival in India, its global manifestations, and the influential role that Buddhism and colonialism played in the making of modern South Asia.

