

Universal Buddhism, Regional Social Equality: Indian Ambedkarites in East Asia

Jon Keune

The great Dalit (so-called “Untouchable”) leader Bhimrao Ambedkar converted with some 400,000 followers to Buddhism in 1956 as way of protesting untouchability and striving for social equality. Ambedkar’s rationalist vision of Buddhism focused on social transformation, explicitly responding to caste prejudice in modern India. Ambedkarite Buddhists carry on this legacy while exploring further what Buddhism means to them. Over the past thirty years, they have found new inspiration and challenges through increased contact with Buddhists from Japan and Taiwan, and as Ambedkarites migrate to East Asia and beyond. When cross-cultural, inter-sectarian Buddhist encounters occur, what happens to the idea of social equality, which Ambedkarites historically viewed in terms of caste difference in India and now adjust to reckon with ethnic difference in East Asia? How do people reckon the idea of “Buddhism” as a universal religion (valid for everyone) with the context-sensitive visions for equality while moving across cultural contexts? In this talk, Prof. Keune will share observations from his ongoing research in Japan and Taiwan.



Jon Keune is an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Michigan State University, focusing on religion, social history, and cross-cultural translation. His earlier research worked with Marathi language sources to explore caste and social equality in Hindu devotional traditions, which he published numerous articles and book chapters, a co-edited volume *Hindu Communities of Devotion in India: Outsiders, Insiders, and Interlopers* (Routledge, 2019), and a monograph *Shared Devotion, Shared Food: Equality and the Bhakti-Caste Question in Western India* (Oxford, 2021). His recent research explores transnational Buddhism and Dalit migration from India to East Asia and beyond. He is currently a Fulbright Global Scholar

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- **Date:** Nov 30, 2022
- **Time:** 15:30-16:30 Osaka, Sapporo, Tokyo
- **Format:** Hybrid (No registration required)
- **In Person Venue:** Room 301, Building 10, Sophia University
- **Zoom Meeting URL:** <https://sophia-ac-jp.zoom.us/j/95552319858>
- **Meeting ID:** 955 5231 9858
- **Passcode:** 059486



Link to the Zoom meeting

This event is organized by [Kiyokazu OKITA](#) (Associate Professor of Hindu Studies, FLA)

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