Introduction

FROM THE HEAD OF THE BODHISATTVA GUANYIN you can see the shore. The series of inlets and tiny islands along it was covered with trees and dotted with homes before the tsunami flattened many of them. Guanyin was fine though. She is quite tall and a good distance from the ocean. This statue, the sixth tallest in the world, stands awkwardly on the top of a small hill outside of Sendai, along the coast in the Tohoku region of northern Japan. There she stood for twenty years before the tsunami, and she will probably stand silently for many more as roads are repaired, shops reopened, and schools rebuilt. She might be the last of her kind though. She was constructed in the early 1990s, before Japan's debt soared, before the 1995 Kobe earthquake and the 2011 tsunami, before the disaster at Fukushima, and before the oft-repeated "crisis of confidence" among the consumers of Japan.

Guanyin is not alone though; she is one of many very big bodhisattva and buddha statues in Asia. Indeed, of the top thirty tallest statues in the world, twenty-six are either buddhas or bodhisattvas. Of the top ten, only one, the Statue of Peter the Great in Russia (no. 8) is not Asian and seven of the top ten are Buddhist. The Statue of Liberty is number 39 on the list. The Sendai Daikannon (The Great Guanyin/Guanyin/Avalokiteśvara in Sendai, Japan) statue is 330 feet tall, more than twice the height of her sister in New York City. The Spring Temple Vairocana Buddha statue in Leshan, China, the tallest statue in the world, is 420 feet. From the small window in Guanyin's head, I could easily see the shore and far beyond into the great expanse of a violent sea, but I spent most of my time looking down.

I arrived in Sendai about two months after the tsunami had caused massive destruction and loss of life in Japan. Although it was irrational, moving at 130 miles an hour, I remember considering holding my breath as the train raced past the Dainichi Nuclear Power Plant at Fukushima on the way north, and past the third-tallest statue in the world, the Ushiku Daibutsu (Big

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Buddha of Ushiku). Like most people in the world, I was at a loss what to do or say about the disaster. With my less than two years of Japanese-language study at that point, even if I'd known what to say, it would have come out awkwardly and probably grammatically incorrect. It felt strange conducting research on new Buddhist museums, parks, and monuments, especially at that time and place. I thought I should have been more experienced emotionally, since I'd been on a research trip in Thailand soon after the 2004 tsunami there. However, back then I was safely ensconced in a manuscript archive with familiar colleagues speaking a familiar language, not traveling in an unfamiliar region in a barely familiar country to a very large statue surrounded by a public park, wedding center, and golf course.

Inside the huge statue, at a loss for words, trying to rationalize my way through impossible situations and improbable places, I looked down away from the shore and through the hollow central core of the statue. The nine suspended floors were connected by small bridges and stairways. Each floor held shrines to twelve smaller statues, most of them other buddhas and bodhisattvas, including thirty-three smaller statues of Guanyin/Kannon, all in

Sendai Daikannon

different poses. As I walked down the steps I was able to circumambulate these 108 statues all the way to the ground floor, which houses a museum of life-size statues of bodhisattvas and protector deities representing the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac, the Buddhas of the Pure Lands, and more statues of Guanyin, among many others. That day, I, along with three Japanese history experts (Satoshi Sonehara, Orion Klautau, and William Bodiford), were the only visitors to this giant statue besides an amorous young couple who looked as if they were trying to find a quiet place to be alone.[1] The entire museum, including three gift shops, a ticket counter, a wedding center, a pet cemetery, and a park, was being run by a single staff person. At first I thought it was the aftermath of the tsunami that was keeping the crowds away from this massive site. However, I soon realized that the weeds growing in the cracks, the abandoned golf course, the gated-up parking lot, the shuttered entertainment center, the broken lights and the empty fountain, and the frayed flags were the result of long-term neglect. The entrance sign had fallen down. If the waves of the tsunami had actually reached the statue, there wouldn't have been much on the ground to wash away.

A small, three-room temple stood behind the statue. Inside, a staff person and two monks seemed surprised to see us. They had little to do with the statue and did not even have literature or brochures about its history. They reluctantly answered my questions, saying that the statue does get a good crowd of visitors once a month when there is a flea market on its grounds and the occasional school group arrives, but they did not seem to pay attention much to its operation. They had not conducted any special chanting session or memorial service for the tsunami and often did not have an audience for their regular morning chanting. I was surprised that Orion Klautau, who had lived in Japan for many years, most of them in Sendai, had never been to the statue. Professor Sonehara had been to the statue only once before, and he had lived in Sendai for thirty years. He said it certainly was big and could be seen from almost every place in the city, but for him, it just interrupted the views of the mountains, and frankly, I think he thought it was strange I wanted to visit it. He had a much more enjoyable time taking me to Matsushima to see the Zuiganji monastery and the regional history museum nearby. For him, as it seemed for most people in Sendai, the Daikannon was like an old console television in the living room, certainly big and once beautiful, that you now wish someone would just take away.

The Sendai Daikannon was the brainchild of Yorozu Sugawara, who, until his passing, was the CEO of the Futaba Sōgō Development Company in the Daikanmitsuji Precinct of Sendai. He had amassed a fortune in non-residential buildings for lease and many other ventures. However, after the decline of the Japanese economy in the late 1990s, the company is now no longer viable, and without Sugawara's vision and his company's funds, there

is not enough support to properly maintain the statue or museum. While the Daikannon of Sendai might be declining into insignificance because of particular local economic reasons, it is not an isolated case. Many large Buddhist public museums, parks, and monuments, such as the Laykyun Setkyar Buddha (Monywa, Burma), the Awaji Kannon in Southern Japan, or the Sanctuary of Truth near Pattaya, Thailand, could be considered—in terms of the numbers of visitors, general upkeep and staff support, and amount of scholarly and artistic interest—failures. The Awaji Kannon, for example, is the twelfth-tallest statue in the world. Despite the expense of building a museum inside a statue this large, the museum is now abandoned. When I visited the site in February 2013, on a breezy winter day, it stood locked up. Several of the windows of the museum at its base were broken, the gate stood in disrepair with weeds growing around its base. The park around it and the "America" restaurant next door were also in disrepair. Behind the 295 foot tall statue stood an approximately twenty-foot replica of the Statue of Liberty, which was also closed to the public.[2] The town of Awaji, replete with seaside shops, a replica of the London Bridge, and a children's park, had seen better days. Not even Guanyin could save this town, it seems, from declining domestic tourism.

Not all giant buddha images are dying. Some, like the Buddhist enlightenment park in Bodh Gaya (North India), the Kamakura Daibutsu (near Yokohama, Japan), the Fairy Stream Amusement Park and Buddhist Temple (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam), and the Phra Putthamingmongkol Akenakkiri (Phuket, Thailand), receive tens of thousands of visitors every year. The Tian Tan Buddha (Lantau Island, Hong Kong) has a fun cable car that takes thousands of visitors every month to its base. The cable car station is home to a large shopping mall, and advertisements for the Tian Tan Buddha are often coupled with advertisements for Hong Kong Disneyland amusement park nearby.[3]

The success or failure of different Buddhist leisure and tourist sites (and I am defining success and failure simply in a site's ability to consistently attract visitors, fees, and donations, and be kept up and open on a regular basis) is difficult to generalize and depends largely on a combination of many economic, political, and labor/managerial factors, as well as specific local issues. However, that being said, as we will see in this book, the sites that are thriving usually offer not only delight and spectacle that attracts visitors, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, local and foreign, but also opportunities to listen to sermons and perform basic rituals. They also are usually in areas that offer other shopping, dining, and entertainment options for local and international tourists so that they can attract people looking for a variety of activities for families (especially those with young children). The more geographically isolated places often must have bigger spectacle displays to attract people from greater distances. These largely non-monastic spaces need to offer some type

of ritual opportunity because this attracts local visitors to come to the site re-peatedly after the effect of the spectacle has worn off. A person performing a ritual will come to a site again and again, whereas a person seeking only to witness the spectacle, and perhaps shop, will come only once or twice. How-ever, some sites that offer both entertainment and ritual fail despite the efforts of architects to make their sites ecumenical, international, and acces-sible. Macro- and microeconomic conditions and political strife that can affect a site are often out of the designer's and owner's control. Moreover, a site's location (which includes the availability of affordable transportation and minimal national visa/immigration restrictions) and affordability are what actually determine how many people can visit and will want to come back.[4] In other words, if you build it, they will come (that is, if the train station is nearby, the entrance fee is cheap, and the food is good).

That being said, I am less concerned with the "success" or "failure" of these sites. I am concerned with what these sites tell us about the study of religion. Despite the factors of location and affordability, there are three ma-jor arguments about these Buddhist leisure sites that I assert are important for the study of contemporary religion more broadly: First, the sites described in this book all show the importance of public religious culture and, more specifically, they demonstrate religious leisure from a Buddhist cultural per-spective. The secular versus the religious, which is in many ways a false binary, are categories broken down at these sites. The sites are open to all people, regardless of their religious faith, practice, or lack thereof. One does not need any deep knowledge of Buddhist texts, chants, history, and no test of faith is required. People can often participate in activities that may be called explicitly religious such as chanting, prostrating, offering gifts, or meditating, or they can relax, chat leisurely, laugh, or gawk in amazement. As at secular parks, monuments, and amusement sites, visitors can have lunch, buy gifts, talk on their cell phones, or flirt. Visitors can learn something about Buddhist teachings or history, but this is not required. There is no particular way of per-forming or participating in Buddhist leisure. Certainly, specific cultural pref-erences in cuisine, jokes, dress, design, and color schemes do exist, but these do not have much connection to particular Buddhist teachings. There isn't really a particular Buddhist way to play, laugh, or nap, of course. In later chap-ters I also mention, in passing, for example, concomitant sponsored leisure sites with Catholic or Hindu themes, which operate in largely the same way and encourage similar leisure pursuits.

That being said, there are particular characteristics that define Bud-dhist public and leisure sites, and those lead us to the second argument: these sites reflect a growing Buddhist ecumenism that is partially the result of global communication and construction technologies, and partially of the Buddhist value of learning through affective encounters without an agenda.

Many of these sites, success or failure aside, were designed by (primarily) men who have had global visions and aspirations. What makes this global Buddhism peculiar in comparison with many other global religious movements is that it does not actively seek converts, allegiance, or centralized power. There is no effort to "save" people or consciously prepare for an apocalypse or a day of judgment. Despite the growing Buddhist ecumenism throughout Asia, there have been no efforts to create a Vatican-like Buddhist capital, Buddhist homeland or caliphate, or global sect or institution, and no concerted efforts to influence global politics or economics. These sites are often individually ecumenical in purpose, but they execute this vision largely independently from each other. There is not a global Buddhist network of Buddhist ecumenical sites or a small cadre of men focused on creating a Buddhist empire. Metaphorically, these sites can be likened to a train network without a central hub or terminal stations—all are welcome, all mix without end. In Buddhist metaphorical terms they are similar to Indra's net, not a mandala. I later look closely at what it means to promote ecumenism without a specific telos in mind, on the one hand, or a coordinated effort among men with money on the other.

This leads to the third and final argument: the best laid plans often fail. Despite the vision of people like Kenzo Tange, Lek Wiriyaphan, Shi Fa Zhao, and others discussed below, building spectacular ecumenical leisure sites often runs into problems along the way. Methodologically, I approach the study of religion through the lens of material culture in the lineage of Alfred Gell, Cynthia Bogel, Eugene Wang, and David Morgan. Therefore, I take the materiality and the agency of material seriously. Parks, monuments, and museums, like temples, are complex adaptive systems changed and influenced by visitors, budgets, materials, and local and global economic conditions. They often respond to the cacophony of opinions on Internet travel sites, blogs, and local and newspaper reviews. No matter what the architect intends, buildings develop lives of their own. Therefore, although I look closely at three architects in this book (and many other comparative examples), I do not believe that they are lone visionaries who can simply execute their art in a vacuum. They have to adapt, often without admitting the compromise to themselves, to local conditions and the agency of particular materials. Their ecumenical dreams are interrupted by local and very specific realities. They compromise along the way and settle at local optima. Let me explain these arguments one by one.

Buddhist Public Leisure Culture and the Importance of Spectacle

Over the last two hundred years, the great rise in Buddhist public culture has in many ways mirrored the rise in public culture throughout the world. Pub-

lic sites discussed in this book break down the often false binary between the secular and the religious. Secular architects have been called on by Buddhist monks, nuns, and lay devotees to design new types of Buddhist spaces outside traditional monastic ritual and educational complexes in places like Sendai and Saigon; there has been a growth in Buddhist museums, parks, memorials, and shops selling Buddhist products; and, of course, most recently there has been a rise in publicly accessible websites built by Buddhist organizations of various types.[5] Regardless of religious, ethnic, or sectarian identity, people can visit these places physically or virtually, are not required to make statements of allegiance or faith, and generally are not required to contribute money (besides the occasional small entrance fee in some cases) or give gifts in exchange for their visit. Buddhist public culture has become part of public culture more broadly in Asia. This public (or open-to-the-public) leisure culture is often centered around the spectacle, as we will see.

In the recent history of Buddhism, public Buddhist sites flourished in Japan more than in any other place. Of course the giant buddha images (*daibutsu*) such as the ones in the Todaiji in Nara or the thirteenth-century Kamakura Daibutsu have long been iconic sites in Japan, like the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan or the walking Buddha of Sukhothai were and are to Afghanistan and Thailand, respectively.[6] However, the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Japan saw a flurry of building *daibutsu* not seen before, thanks to new concrete building techniques and the rise of a new wealthy laity not formally connected to particular monasteries or noble bloodlines.[7] For example, in 1922 a twenty-foot-tall statue of Amida Buddha, called the Yobiko Daibutsu, was erected in Saga Prefecture. The taller Ōfuna Kannon was built in 1960 to the south of Tokyo. Its designer, Kōun Takamura, built it originally as a temporary structure for an amusement park. It was based on the earlier Ueno Daibutsu in Tokyo. In 1928, the Beppu Daibutsu, which no longer survives, was built near the city of Usuki by a wealthy businessman, who later became a Jōdo priest, named Eizaburō Okamoto. A tourist resort was built around the statue. One large temporary *daibutsu* was even built in San Francisco in 1915 by a Japanese group at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. It was modeled on the earlier Nōfuku Daibutsu in Kobe and "functioned as a showplace for Japanese products displayed at the fair."[8]

These statues were part of a class of sites called *misemono* or "spectacle attractions" that attract people to festivals.[9] Although these *misemono* sites often include giant buddha images, recently a giant "Tetsujin 28-go" robot was built in Kobe and a giant mechanical robot called Gundam built in front of Diver City Plaza shopping complex and amusement park in Tokyo. Both are over fifty feet tall and based on the popular *mecha* (or *meka,* short for mechanical) genre of anime/manga characters popular with children and adults in Japan.[10] They were built as temporary installments to promote the

commercial and entertainment complexes. *Daibutsu* have served similar purposes. While Takamura's was one of the first postwar examples, there have been many since, including the Sendai and Awaji images.[11]

I am not necessarily suggesting a direct relationship, but the early twentieth century also saw the rise of public parks, amusement parks, and government promotion of health, exercise, leisure, sports, and family time in Japan. The first amusement park was built in Osaka in 1912 (directly inspired by Coney Island in New York). A government report emphasized the importance of public parks in 1907, and government study in 1923 drew connections between leisure time and health and even proposed reducing workers' hours. Tourist hotels also started to open in great numbers, new tourist magazines were launched between 1890 and 1930, and the Japanese Tourist Board (Nihon Kōtsū Kōsha) opened in 1912. The Japanese government went on, in the postwar period, to help fund leisure spaces in Indonesia and Thailand, among other places. Related to this, government restrictions on Buddhist temples' income and the reduction of their landholdings in the Meiji period led many abbots to start carnivals and annual family fun days at temples in order to increase temple funds. These carnivals were connected to *kaichō* (the opening of temple sanctuaries and the exposure of certain precious statues and relics), which attracted crowds.

While these large public Japanese Buddhist sites might have been the most prevalent in the contemporary era, below we will see that Buddhists in other regions have also, because of rising economic resources and the involvement of a wider swath of lay supporters and visionaries, invested in creating a Buddhist built environment outside traditional monastic compounds. They've stretched the idea of what a monastery can be and shown how little actual ordained nuns and monks are involved in the building of these non-monastic Buddhist leisure sites.

Too much distinction can be made between Buddhist monastic and non-monastic sites, though. These leisure sites offer a space in between the secular and the religious. In most of mainland Southeast Asia, many, if not most, men and some women take part in temporary ordination and feel comfortable in both lay and monastic settings. They may spend only a short time in the monastery and return to lay life. Most monasteries in the region have active lay councils that help support the monastery administratively and financially. Most of the men, and some of the women, on these councils were ordained in the past or plan to be ordained in the future. In Sri Lanka, monasteries are often run by a mixture of ordained and lay people from the same extended family. Japan over the past 150 years has seen the rise of married Buddhist priests and a blurring of lines between monkhood, priesthood, and lay in Buddhist life. Numerous priests in Japan now run liturgical services and funerary rites at monasteries on weekends, but dress in lay clothes and

have nonreligious jobs during the week. In Singapore and Hong Kong, the daily running of many monasteries and shrines is undertaken by dedicated lay people. Furthermore, for many monks and nuns, daily activity might not be centered on keeping their monastic rules, conducting rituals, or providing pedagogical and liturgical services, but on managing monastic finances, repairing plumbing or electrical appliances, or creating Buddhist websites. Although some *daibutsu* and other large public Buddhist *misemono* were built at monasteries under the supervision of Buddhist priests like Wajo Kōsō of the Kōsanji monastery outside Hiroshima, many were built without any defined connection to a monastery or priest. For example, some *misemono,* such as the Naritasan Shinjōji Peace Pagoda (*tahōtō*), built in 1984, were sponsored and designed by lay committees but are built on monastery property. Some priests, like Kōsō, are also public figures. He was a Jōdo-Shinshū priest, but also a successful steel manufacturer, art collector, and world traveler.[12]

In many places in Asia, the distinction between religious sites, royal sites, and "beautiful" sites is blurry. For example, similar to *misemono, meisho* in Japan are "famous places" and are often connected to sites mentioned in classical Japanese poetry and drama. *Meisho* include places like Mount Fuji, but also Buddhist monastic buildings like the Golden Pavilion in Kyoto, Shinto (*jinja*) shrines like the Kasuga Shrine in Nara, picturesque lakes and waterfalls like Takachiho in Miyazaki, important government or imperial places, and so on. Religious and nonreligious sites are similar. They are famous for their beauty, historical or literary significance, or Buddhist, Shinto, or Imperial sacredness, or, most often, a combination of all these things. In Thailand, I have been on weekend trips with many of my Thai coworkers and colleagues, piling into large tour buses replete with karaoke machines, DVD/VCD players, and even disco balls. On these trips, we visit a combination of monasteries, waterfalls, historic sites, shopping malls, new museums, and ancient palaces. Buddhist monasteries are as much tourist sites to Thai Buddhists as they are to foreign non-Buddhists; while Thai Buddhists will participate in some ritual activity at these monasteries on their tours, they will be tourists as well. They will enjoy big group meals, listen to music, joke around, and post photographs on Facebook. Local people visit these sites, like foreign tourists do, not just for religious or ritual reasons, but also for leisure activities and family vacations.

Religious and nonreligious spaces are not often separated into special categories in tourist books throughout the world. However, in the academic discipline of religious studies, religious and nonreligious "beautiful places" like the National Cathedral and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, or Saint Basil's and the Bolshoi in Moscow are not often subjects of comparison, even though an average tourist might visit both in the same day. They end up

sharing space in the same photo album of a tourist, but not in the pages of a scholarly study. In religious studies, we often compare a religious site to another religious site and consider "religion" as the natural category they both share. However, if we compare beautiful site to beautiful site or *misemono* to *misemono* or *meisho* to *meisho,* what new possibilities can emerge?[13] Leisure is not antithetical to the study of religion. In fact, focusing on leisure shows the flaws in attempting to excise the religious from the secular and vice versa.

This is not a new phenomenon; festival, beauty, and leisure have been part of Buddhist life in and around monasteries, as it was around Catholic churches in Europe or Hindu temples in India for centuries. Famous studies by Victor Turner and Michele Salzman have shown how festival and leisure activities often sprang up along pilgrimage routes and near temple and church enclosures.[14] What has changed is that contemporary architects are being commissioned to design particular places specifically for Buddhist leisure activity and that this aspect of Buddhist public culture is being explicitly promoted, even by monks.

What do I mean by public? Work coming out of postmodern literary studies, sociology, subaltern studies, political science, and economics is so vast, it is difficult to summarize. Much of the recent work on public culture and "counterpublics" has been a response to Jürgen Habermas's seminal work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.*[15] His work, and much of the critical response to it, focused on the role of the citizen, self-cultivation, mass media, democratic debate, the rise of the middle class, and state efforts to undermine the efforts of private individuals to have public voices in western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These studies are characterized by a study of political and social conflict. Although Habermas tended to idealize the rational and participatory communication that transcends class and economic conflict in public places, the problem for many critics is that there is no ideal nonpolitical space and no genuinely impersonal and apolitical dialog. People, in a sense, do not act passively and apolitically naturally, but have been conditioned to do so by long-term coercion and the internalization of power acting on them. Moreover, critics in the lineage of Bakhtin argue, in my opinion quite correctly, that it is difficult to trace patterned and rational discourse in public space and that "the sort of dialogue that is really meaningful to 'ordinary' people in their daily lives—is in fact fluid, permeable and always contested. Thus, far from speaking about abstract formal unities or abstract and formal rules of argumentation, people implicitly think and talk about the complexities and multiplicities that they face in real living social contexts."[16] In other words, in no particular order they talk about how their children are doing in school, what they plan to eat for lunch, their cell phone bills, what temples they have visited in the past, soccer, and where they got those shoes. These important topics are occasionally inter-

woven with arguments and reflections of the major political, ethical, and social questions of the day.

These responses to Habermas's work would be a welcome addition to the study of Buddhist public culture, especially in the context of the growing literature on Buddhism and the state.[17] However, here I want to concentrate not on the political activity, class delineations, and surveillance and oppression that can occur within public places in Buddhist Asia, but on individuals' efforts to design new public places and the way they teach Buddhist history, ethics, and rituals. I focus more on individual architects' efforts to create these places and on how Buddhism is presented as a subject rather than provide ethnographies of what happens after they are created. I have visited every site discussed in these pages, some of them multiple times, and observed much and interviewed dozens of people, both formally and informally. However, here I stick to the architects and designers themselves. Based on my readings, interviews, and observations, although these sites have the potential to be places of public political activity and state surveillance, so far they generally have not. Instead they are places of leisure, relatively passive observance, tourism, low-level commerce, and casual repose. As will be seen, particularly in my discussion of hell parks and sculpture gardens, many Buddhist leisure places thrive on the aesthetics of spectacle, the grotesque, the comic, and the absurd. While small groups of visitors will inevitably discuss politics among themselves, there have been for the most part no significant instances of public debate, rebellion, or oppression at the places I will discuss. Certainly a huge abandoned buddha falling apart or even an amusement park mixing Buddhist values of humility and nonattachment with conspicuous consumption in Vietnam, Thailand, or Japan would be a poignant backdrop for a protest on the very value of religion in contemporary society, but so far local politics has largely left these Buddhist public sites alone. This could change anytime of course.

I am less concerned with these theoretical debates on the idea of public culture and the politics of public places. Most studies of public culture have, for good reason, excluded the study of religious public places; most have been of public parks, train stations, waterfronts, hotel lobbies, movie theatres, city squares, stadiums, and even parking lots.[18] This might be because these are largely Western studies, and religious spaces in the Jewish and Christian West are largely private or semiprivate spaces with official member or parishioner lists, formal social activities and rituals, clearly designated ecclesia, and the like. Some synagogues and churches have strict gender restrictions and even entrance fees that can be paid only by formally approved members. On occasion, even weekly, churches and synagogues can host sports tournaments, raffles, pancake breakfasts, fish fries, academic competitions, dances, language classes, and reading and study clubs. However, that is usually not their designated primary mission.

In most contemporary Buddhist cultures, most religious places are semiprivate as well, but often do not require active participation, official membership, or regular dues or donations. By "semiprivate" I mean that they are open to the Buddhist and non-Buddhist public (i.e., most monasteries do not have restrictions on who can visit), but there are standards of dress and decorum; a clearly defined ecclesia of nuns, novices, and monks; a designated ritual and educational space; and formal and semiformal ritual and liturgical activities.

People know when they are in a monastic space, and physical deportment changes for most visitors. For example, many years ago I was in a large monastery in Chiang Mai (Northern Thailand) waiting to meet with the abbot in order to gain permission to read manuscripts in their library. As I waited, a group of tourists entered the monastery's main sermon hall (*wihan*) where I was sitting and waiting. In the main hall, about fifty novice monks were kneeling on the floor listening to the abbot. Most of the tourists respectfully bowed their heads, folded their hands across their bodies, removed their hats and shoes, and looked nervous. Meanwhile Thai staff and visitors chatted openly, took photographs, joked around a bit, and generally paid no attention to the abbot at the front of the room or to the novices. I overheard one tourist whisper to the person next to them, "How can they be so rude while the abbot gives a sermon? Don't they respect his teachings?" What the tourist did not realize was that the abbot was not giving a sermon, he was telling the novices to be on time the next day for their class photograph. They were being told to fold their robes properly, be on time, and not fool around. Every year the monastic school had a photograph taken and they needed to make it look nice. He was simply conducting one of the many duties of a busy abbot. However, since he was not speaking in a language understandable to the tourists, they assumed that conduct in a "sacred" place or "house of worship" should be of a certain type (reserved, reverent, and respectful). Their bodies went automatically into the default mode of their own religious upbringing. The architecture of the room, combined with their expectations, worked on their bodies in clearly observable ways. I am sure I have acted in similarly uninformed ways when visiting orthodox churches in Russia or mosques in Turkey with my family as a tourist: hat off, hands folded, voice hushed, head down.

Visitors to monasteries across Asia are often surprised by the lack of decorum in many places and the amount of social and familial activity. Of course, many monasteries in Asia often find themselves used as public spaces where children play and run around, groups play cards and board games, people gossip and drink tea, and the like. Many host annual festivals, temporary amusement games, flea markets, and even beauty and singing contests. These activities are often not the main objective of the monastery,

and social activities are often on clearly defined days of the year or in the midafternoon. Midafternoon is the time when many monks have done their morning duties and the grounds of the monastery are empty because monks are at other monasteries conducting funerals or other rituals, meditating or studying in their rooms, or occasionally napping. Most people who visit the monastery in the early morning, evening, or on weekends see the monastery as a place for ritual, liturgy, meditation, study, the production of religious material, and the ordination and training of monastics or professional religieux. But other times, people can also go to a monastery, and often do, to relax and chat with friends.

Most studies of Buddhist culture and history are rooted in the institution of the monastery. This is logical. Most Buddhist teachings, art, music, and architecture emerge from monastic life. In this study, I am considering Buddhist "public" spaces as largely synonymous with non-monastic and non-sectarian spaces. "Public" should not be considered synonymous with large, accessible, or famous. For example, Wat Dhammakaya in Thailand and Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan are two of the best-known and largest monasteries in the world.[19] They have an impressive presence on the World Wide Web in multiple languages and have satellite centers in a variety of countries. The same can be said of Hsi Lai Temple on Hacienda Heights in Southern California, Fo Guang Shan French Center in the suburbs of Paris, or the Chi Lin Nunnery Kowloon (Hong Kong), which variously run vegetarian restaurants, book stores, and museums.[20] However, these are all specific sectarian monasteries with nuns and monks in residence. They are open to lay visitors of all religions and classes, but actively promote their own sectarian rituals and approaches, and were begun and still remain as monasteries that specifically train monastics. Increasingly these monasteries are playing a larger and larger role in the public sphere, especially through mass meditation sessions involving thousands of people on certain weekends, which are broadcast on the web or through their own television stations. They also hold large ceremonies chanting for the protection of their respective nations or promoting certain social and political issues such as nuclear antiproliferation, the sexual morality of teenagers, nonviolence, or vegetarianism. Many of their monks and nuns have Facebook pages or personal websites to promote their monastery's agendas. I will not be exploring this type of Buddhist activity in this study, but it certainly is an important part of public culture.

The spaces I focus on below are run largely by the laity, with no connection to a single monastery, or are connected only loosely to the formal space and activity of a monastery and its concomitant ordained hierarchy. They do not ordain or train monks or nuns. These are places that are used not merely on occasion for non-monastic, non-ritual, non-liturgical, and noneducational activity, but are designated as such. In most cases they are privately owned,

but open to visitors from all walks of life. Oftentimes one finds very few monks or nuns in these spaces, and those that are there are not in roles of teachers or administrators and do not offer formal sermons, accept formal gifts, or conduct specific rituals. These places in general are not affiliated with a specific lineage, sect, or school of Buddhism (although most visitors might come from a certain sect) and the designers and directors of these places do not overtly promote a particular approach to Buddhist learning and practice. In one example, though, I look closely at one location in Singapore that can be seen as having both a ritual (although not monastic) and public role. I will also briefly mention avant-garde Buddhist monastic architecture in Ehime and on Awaji Shima (Japan), and in Ang Thong and Chiang Rai (Thailand), which represent both public and monastic places. These examples, I hope, demonstrate the complexity and religious-secular ambiguity of these places in contemporary Buddhist Asia.

Therefore, I do not aim to study the public culture of contemporary Buddhism in general terms, but look at specific places and specific architects that, using Michael Warner's expression, "create a public."[21] He sees a public, like a public for a novel or a film, as categorized by choice—"a public organizes itself independently of state institutions, laws, formal frameworks of citizenship, or preexisting institutions such as the church."[22] A public is self-organized and self-creating and often ephemeral and discontinuous.[23] While this may be an idealized way of understanding a public and may not work as well for actual physically (albeit loosely) bounded places like parks, monuments, shops, and museums such as those I am researching, Warner poses a good question for those interested in religious studies to think about: "Imagine how powerless people would feel if their commonality and participation were simply defined by pre-given frameworks, by institutions and laws, as in other social contexts through kinship. What would the world look like if all ways of being public were more like applying for a driver's license or subscribing to a professional group—if, that is, formally organized mediations replaced the self-organized public as the image of belonging and common activity?"[24]

To better refine what counts as "public," and in an effort to look at the ways that places can create publics in contemporary Buddhist culture, I focus on leisure—what I like to call socially disengaged Buddhism. Scholars of Buddhist studies have always been very good at presenting research on obligation—paths (Pali: *magga*), sects (*nikāya*), ways (*yāna*), precepts and ascetic rules (i.e., things that fall under the categories of *vinaya*), morals, and the like. The role of the laity, especially studies of what lay families do in or outside their homes at their leisure, and writings or art of lay Buddhist artists and scholars have been much less important to scholars, including myself.[25] Our primary subject—monasteries and monks and the art they create

and books they write—are places defined by discipline and obligation. We have not been so good at studying leisure, the non-teleological and nonformal. In Western films, books, and art depicting and describing Buddhists, practitioners have been long associated with sobriety, discipline, shaven heads, and neatly folded robes. It is almost as if 1960s hippie self-importance and general humorlessness was projected on to monks and nuns. The picture of Buddhists I was given and reimagined growing up in the 1970s and 1980s was an impossible mixture of superhuman mental warriors and childlike innocents meditating in a distant forest. They were what I wanted them to be and what I wanted to be when I was a teenager—serious, supercool, and dressed in Zen jet-black.

Now in my early forties, I suppose I appreciate the less serious side of Buddhist life, and so have turned to the study of leisure. My back hurts, my feet are sore. When speaking of leisure, I am not referring to very active debates in sociology and economics on the activities of the so-called leisure class or the vast literature on games and contests.[26] Instead I simply am referring to the non-obligated parts of life in Johan Huizinga's sense of the term. Huizinga was concerned with, among other things, leisure as *licere,* or that which is permitted or unbound.[27] Although the field of religious studies has not concerned itself much with leisure, when it has, it has usually been with leisure as *otium* (retreat, meditation, spiritual exercises, contemplation, even monastic *labora*, like gardening and manuscript copying), as Petrarch did in his famous *On Religious Leisure* (*De otio religioso*)—not idleness (Latin: *accidia*), but an active reflection on theological conundrums and ultimate truths.[28] Some religious studies scholars have profitably learned from the approaches of Bakhtin or Turner and have seen religious festivals, plays, or pilgrimages as alternative or liminal places for testing and then reaffirming the value and power of moral rules and social norms.[29] Leisure as *otium* is functionalist and goal oriented. However, in these new Buddhist places, activity is not necessarily directed or designed to be overtly purposive. Now, one could say that anyone who visits a Buddhist museum, monument, or park is purposefully "making-merit" or has an ulterior motive based on a vague sense of spiritual advancement. The same people might also want to impress members of their social circle with their wholesome activity or financial ability to travel and take time off from work. Others want to collect amulets, try new food, or take photographs. Perhaps there is no such thing as purposeless or non-teleological action. I certainly grant that true freedom and choice might be illusions. Every choice we make is somewhat controlled by our socioeconomic context and cultural and genetic background, and influenced constantly by the choices of others. However, unlike directly giving gifts to members of the sangha, chanting, performing rituals, participating in group meditation, or taking on precepts in a monastic setting, the goals in these Buddhist public and leisure

places is not often articulated or prescribed by the architects themselves or the lay or ordained managers. It is not presented as a series of systematic assignments on signs, pamphlets, or mission statements. There are many social, economic, soteriological, and ritual reasons for entering a monastery, studying a Buddhist treatise, or performing a ritual, but there are few easily definable reasons or articulated goals for going to a museum or amusement park, besides a vague sense of intellectual enrichment, physical relaxation, or the desire to just pass time.

Buddhist visitors are not just lounging around passively in the places I describe in the following chapters. They are engaging in what Lauren Rabinovitz calls "energized relaxation," which is activity without having larger economic, social, religious, or intellectual goals.[30] These places are not necessary. Visiting them does not directly improve one's chances at a job promotion, earn credit toward a degree, contribute knowledge needed to pass monastic or secular examinations, provide a place for a life-cycle ritual like tonsure, ordination, marriage, or cremation, or even provide karmic merit to improve one's present and future life.

While at these sites a person can engage in short-term distractions or short-term acts of accumulation. An act of accumulation can include the purchase of a piece of religious paraphernalia or memorabilia, as well as the incremental and accretive learning of ethical or historical facts about Buddhism, without an expressed goal. Parents often need inexpensive places to take children, and if the children can have an opportunity to learn a little history or something about their religious heritage then these places can serve as both distractions and educational venues. Children do not resist visiting these places, as seen from my experience, because these places are safe and visually stunning and parents can allow children to run around. Parents with teenage children go to these places to keep children away from narcotics and other less-savory pastimes. What Rabinovitz and Miriam Hansen see as one of the most important factors of success for amusement parks and movie theaters can be profitably applied to Buddhist leisure places: "[They] provide a space apart and a space in between . . . a site for the imaginative negotiation of the gaps between family, school, and workplace."[31] These are not places of didactic sermons, forced spirituality, or ethical directives. They are fun.

For the last fifteen years I have been writing on the ways Buddhists learn how to be Buddhist. However, I have largely been studying obligations—the rules, ritual procedures, ethical narratives, and pedagogical methods of Buddhists. In many ways, I have missed studying the joys of Buddhists—the sensuous, entertaining, and beautiful aspects of Buddhist life. I want to pay a bit more attention to the aesthetic and affective aspects of Buddhist cultures and not portray them as simply the frivolous "pretty things" that Buddhists place between them and actual Buddhism. I want to move out of the monas-

tery and away from monk-centric teaching to see how the casual visitor experiences Buddhist history, art, and ideals at their leisure. I am interested in the way this type of "on-the-way" experience happens in non-monastic or semi-monastic spaces. This experience isn't necessarily embedded in ritual, supported by texts, or part of a monastic training regimen, but is part of the total experience of contemporary Buddhism—a part that has been sorely neglected by scholars of religion.

Different Buddhisms are being summarized, universalized, and displayed in these leisure places. Looking closely at a few of these places and their designers will open a venue for discussing the very idea of Buddhist leisure. What I have been most surprised by in this research is that much of Buddhist public space has been designed and promoted by non-monastics and architects and visionaries with little formal training in Buddhist history, texts, or monastic discipline. Moreover, these often very large and public places are sites in which formal training cannot be done and that produce very little if any literature contributing to Buddhist education and scholarship. They host few if any regular sermons and rituals. What does it say about Buddhist experience if a large part of it is not based in texts, history, and philosophy, but in the leisurely experience of art and material culture?

Buddhist Global Ecumenism and Affective Encounters

I am arguing that public leisure culture is an essential part of the study of Buddhism and that by focusing on it we can get away from often false distinctions between the secular and the religious in the study of human cultural expression and meaning-making. However, this argument could be made about the study of any religious tradition. For example, as this book was going to press in March 2015, I had a chance to visit the Garuda Wisnu Kencana Cultural Park in Bali. Although started in 1997, it is still incomplete. The artist, I Nyoman Nuarta, has completed the head and torso of the Hindu god, Viṣṇu (over sixty feet tall alone), and most of the beak and head of his mythical winged mount Garuda. When the two parts are combined the statue should be over 380 feet tall and 190 feet wide, making it nearly the largest in the world. The statue, as it now stands, is surrounded by ice cream shops and a Balinese theatre featuring dances and plays like the Balinese Kris Dance, the Kecak Parade, and the Barong Ngelawang. There is also a photo studio where families can dress as Balinese royalty and, as the sign says, "capture their moment in Balinese or casual style." The park attracts Muslim, Christian, and Hindu families alike, and the PT Alam Sutera Realty group that is funding the project clearly wants the site to be as much a leisure and shopping experience as a place to celebrate Balinese ecumenical culture. They emphasize that they want to "continuously align the harmony between

Muslim and Christian tourists pose for pictures in front of the incomplete statue of Viṣṇu at the Garuda Wisnu Kencana Cultural Park in Bali

human, environment and God the Almighty." The shopping mall is under construction and the large assembly grounds are not yet finished. However, the dramatic views over the south Bali coastline make this an ideal spot for Viṣṇu to enjoy the view. This type of site, and other non-Buddhist ones, is certainly comparable in scale, aim, and management to the Buddhist sites. Therefore, I would hope this book speaks to those interested in Catholic or Islamic leisure, for example. However, this does not mean there is nothing particular about Buddhist public leisure culture.

Let's address the second argument of this book by looking at a field in which Buddhists have traditionally been very bad: Buddhists have traditionally been particularly unskilled in the art of empire-making. Sure, there have been emperors, queens, shoguns, and kings who have patronized particular Buddhist schools and materially and intellectually supported particular

Buddhist teachers and institutions throughout history. However, there have never been serious attempts to create a pan-Buddhist empire. There has never been an agreed-upon capital city or singular holy land for Buddhists. There is no Buddhist pope. There is no central Buddhist ecclesia or ulama. There is no Buddhist notion of being "part of the tribe" and no ethnicity or nationality that makes someone "more" Buddhist. Buddhists have traditionally not agreed upon one canon of religious texts, let alone a single Buddhist scripture that speaks to all. There has never been one classical Buddhist language that all Buddhists use. Whereas a serious student of Jewish or Islamic studies would not be taken seriously without knowing Hebrew or Arabic, respectively, there have been well-known Buddhist scholars who do not know Sanskrit or Pali, on the one hand, or Classical Chinese, Tibetan, or Korean, on the other. There have been plenty of Buddhist travelers and pilgrims, but you are not necessarily a better Buddhist if you have been to Lumbini, Borobodur, Kyoto, Lhasa, Bagan, or Wutai Shan. Being a Nepali Buddhist who knows Sanskrit makes a person no more an authentic voice for Buddhists than does being a Japanese person who can read Classical Chinese. Buddhists have made almost no effort in history to create a unified pan-Buddhist movement or institution or centralized authority. There is no pan-Buddhist law or set of commandments. There is no agreed-upon color for monastic robes. Even the Japanese imperial military vision on the eve of World War II—the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere—was both a failure and decidedly not Buddhist. It is striking to think that the one symbol of pan-Buddhist interaction is the "Silk Road"—not a single place, but a contested conduit.

That being said, Buddhists have been very good at building ecumenical spaces. From the libraries at Dun Huang to the "universities" of Nilanda and Taxila to the great monuments and temples at Angkor or Nara, spectacular Buddhist sites have attracted trans-regional students and pilgrims. Most of these students and pilgrims have not gone back to their homelands and actively attempted to create a pan-Buddhist movement. Similarly, the sites talked about in this book were designed by people with visions of global or, at least, pan-Asian Buddhism, but they have not attempted to start formal institutions, programs, sects, or campaigns. They remain, like large museums or cultural centers, places of pan-Buddhist ecumenical display, not strategy.

What do I mean by Buddhist ecumenism? Ecumenism is a Christian term, from the Greek *oikoumene*, for "the entire inhabited world," and often spelled as *oecumenicall* in early English usages. It has been used to refer to movements in both the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches to create a universal church without sectarian divisions.[32] Despite its specific Christian origins, it can be profitably applied to Buddhism. Whereas there have been specific ecumenical councils in Christian history to develop strategies and guiding principles to create a universal church without denominations

(although never successful), there has been no such concerted effort in Buddhism. Even early Mahayana notions of the *ekayāna* (one vehicle) were merely rhetorical arguments and philosophical positions without institutional support or sustained strategies. However, despite the lack of a pan-Buddhist ecumenical or nondenominational movement, non-monastic Buddhist leisure sites often promote, through accumulation, assembly, and display, a notion that all Buddhist schools and culture are equal and can and should coexist.

These sites are not on a mission to create a new movement or sect with converts and specific ethical, political, and economic policies. They are also rarely, if ever, concerned with the "authentic." They often display collections of objects and decidedly nonconfrontational (and perhaps a little wishy-washy) Buddhist ideas from all over Asia, mixing together newer and older pieces and ethical teachings from various teachers and sects without necessarily favoring a particular vision. Some sites, such as the Ryūkoku Buddhist Museum in Kyoto, have a particular (Jōdo Shinshū) affiliation and certainly display more Jodo Shinshu objects and ideas than from other Buddhist schools, but they emphasize their pan-Buddhist intentions. While a site like Shi Fa Zhao's Nagapushpa Museum in Singapore will mention the age of an "authentic" piece of art from second-century India or ninth-century China, they will place it next to and on equal footing with a new resin buddha image from Thailand. These sites create an ecumenical "atmosphere," a giant curio cabinet of Buddhist cultures similar to other global display gardens (zoos, world music collections, Epcot-like amusement parks, and natural history, folklore, ethnology, and anthropology museums and the like). As an anonymous reader of a draft of this book pointed out, these sites "draw together ideas and objects from around the globe and virtual space to construct meaningful spaces that are articulated as 'Buddhist'"—but, I argue, they don't try to subsequently attempt to create a new type of Buddhism. The sum is often no more than the parts.

Why? What is the point of creating ecumenical Buddhist sites without a desire to create a new movement, new teaching, seek converts, or influence local or international politics? As we will see, the designers and managers of these sites rarely make profits enough to justify the efforts. Some of the sites regularly lose money. They are not training nuns or monks or building large numbers of members. The reasons are much more subtle. First, these sites are not necessarily a product of new technologies. There have been efforts throughout Buddhist history to create ecumenical and pan-Asian Buddhist sites where Buddhists from different linguistic, sectarian, and cultural locales could meet and learn from each other peacefully. However, new travel and communication technologies have greatly increased the ability to build these sites. A Buddhist of relatively modest means can save up to travel to Singapore, Lumbini, Kyoto, Macau, or Bangkok. Wealthy patrons can sponsor nuns

and monks to travel, and families often visit these sites on vacations. Face-book and similar social media tools display photographs and videos of people who have visited these ecumenical sites on their pilgrimages or vacations. Even Buddhists who can't afford these trips are increasingly connected to the Internet and can visit these sites, many of which have extensive web presences. These sites receive gifts from Buddhists all over world and purchase Bud-dhist images, texts, and ritual items on online auctions.

When I first visited a Thai monastery in Bangkok in 1993, there were no computers and, of course, no Internet. Today, many urban monasteries throughout Asia have dedicated computer rooms with Internet access. High-ranking urban monks often produce websites, CDs, and the like, to teach their own students as well as students who have access to the Internet globally. Bud-dhism is packaged as an export product. A new transnational Buddhist class is emerging. New phrases, new rhetoric, have been developed to serve new au-diences. These audiences are not only non-Buddhist or new-Buddhist West-erners, but also other Buddhists in Asia. High-ranking nuns and monks have begun traveling extensively and now can be seen in universities in India and Japan, at Buddhist tourist sites in Sri Lanka, China, Indonesia, and Taiwan, and at international ecumenical Buddhist meetings in Korea, Nepal, and Australia. There are new Buddhist Universities with an ecumenical focus, like the World Buddhist University in Bangkok (started in Australia) and the International Buddhist College (IBC) located in Songkhla (Southern Thai-land), with its parent organization, Than Hsiang Temple, Penang, Malaysia, led by Venerable Wei Wu. The default language at these universities, tourist sites, and conferences is English. Joint Buddhist publications and websites that encourage Japanese Buddhist students to speak to Tibetan Buddhists and to Thai Buddhists are being developed. A wealthy class of international Buddhist patrons from Bangkok, Singapore, Hong Kong, and other places is subsidizing publications, conferences, and temple construction throughout Asia. New electronic Buddhist text editions in multiple scripts with English translations are being launched. There are Buddhist blogs and podcasts.

I assert that these ecumenical sites celebrate broader Buddhist cul-tural values of abundance and accretion. Monastic and non-monastic sites throughout the Buddhist world are characterized by accumulated objects. Even the famously "empty" Soto Zen temples of Japan, as Gregory Levine has shown, have large collections of gifts, artworks, ritual items, and docu-ments on display.[33] As I have previously argued, individual objects and build-ings are certainly appreciated for their beauty, but they are seen as more significant when they become parts of larger collections and develop what I call concomitant associative power. The places I describe in this book are visually stunning spectacles, and each individual statue, plaque, painting, or architectural feature shares space with many other objects, just as the giant

Sendai Guanyin (Daikannon) was filled with many smaller Guanyin. The architects and visionaries that designed them created not only functional spaces for ritual, religious instruction, ecclesiastical meetings, or meditation, but also highly stylized atmospheres filled with seemingly unnecessary, but beautiful, objects. They and their teams of artisans, especially the designers of museums I discuss in chapter 3, could be referred to as *ensembliers* more than architects. These *ensembliers* or decorators or couturiers were often masters of the superfluous and arbitrary, so that their spaces sanction luxury and enjoyment.[34] The overwhelming number of assembled natural and constructed sensual objects work to inhibit systematic learning. This does not mean they are simply a decadent jumble, though. As Daniel Miller notes, some objects are important for the simple fact that they are not isolated and seen individually. They are important because we "do not 'see' them. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behavior, without being open to challenge. They determine what takes place to the extent that we are unconscious of their capacity to do so."[35] They help form a festive atmosphere where one can be anonymous and absorb sensory delight. There is no test of merit or knowledge, no time spent debating with nuns or monks, and no designated time to enter or leave.

Similarly, Michael Taussig asserts that when an object becomes expected and ordinary, it creates a space for non-contemplative practical memory.[36] It becomes "distraction." Distraction is a type of "apperceptive mode." The object is no longer studied individually, it is noticed only when it is absent. With so many statues, murals, flowers, and burning incense sticks in many Buddhist leisure spaces, a visitor is not encouraged to focus on an objective, but to get lost in a maze among a menagerie of distractions and diversions. These distractions are an important but neglected aspect in the study of Buddhist architecture. "As for architecture," Taussig continues, "it is especially instructive because it has served as the prototype over millennia not for perception by the contemplative individual but instead by the distracted collectivity." Architecture is perceived by "touch, or better still, we might want to say, by proprioception, and this to the degree that this tactility, constituting habit, exerts a decisive impact on optical reception."[37]

E. H. Gombrich, one of the most innovative art historians of the twentieth century, whimsically describes a similar idea in the way everyday objects are perceived and how difficult it is to see them individually. On his ninetieth birthday, he wrote a two-paragraph article called "A Note Further to the Drawing of Bicycles," in which he discusses the fact that most people, regardless of their mental capacity, can't accurately draw everyday objects like bicycles. He writes,

> We can all recognise a bicycle, and we can recognise it without difficulty. . . . After all, it has all the elements we remember: two wheels of equal size, one behind the other, handlebars in front, and pedals between the wheels linked to a chain. Where the attempt [in a specific test case he is referring to, but which he is using to make a general argument] went wrong was only in recalling the way the elements are fitted together—much as a child who can tell the features of face and body usually fails to join them correctly. It takes many hours in the lifeclass to learn to do this, though we generally can notice any mistakes or distortions.[38]

Architecture, and the objects arranged in its well-designed rooms—that is, experienced, lived in, played in, worshipped in—becomes normal or taken-for-granted. We often do not notice it and are unable to reconstruct a drawing of even the most iconic places. Can you draw, for example, Sydney's opera house from memory? Can you accurately draw the house you grew up in? Can you accurately draw the objects on your dresser at home without looking at them? Habitual knowledge acquired over time at leisure sites and by the objects arranged in them constitutes a great part of the experience of growing up Buddhist, but it is a knowledge and an experience that happens along the way, and reconstructing how it happened is difficult for most people. However, experience is happening apperceptively. Once you learn to ride a bicycle you never forget, but you often forget how to draw one.

Many of the sites I discuss are heavily ornamented. The ornament of these sights, whether the arabesque floral edges and intricately carved nymphs in Lek Wiriyaphan's Sanctuary of Truth in Thailand; the ghoulish statues at the Suối Tiên Amusement Park in Saigon; or the golden inlaid floors, wrathful bodhisattvas, and sculpted dragons of Shi Fa Zhao's multilevel museum, garden, ritual space, and teahouse in Singapore, works on the visitor and in total possesses an affective potential. Even the deliberate lack of decorative elements in Kenzo Tange's Lumbini Park design attempts to create a feeling of freedom from the chaos of highly ornamental Nepali Buddhist aesthetics. Trees and ponds become ornaments. These places are designed to delight. As Jonathan Hay argues, visual effects, "pleasurable things," create this affective potential. They can, non-didactically, evoke feelings of happiness, prosperity, and even make people laugh—and, I would add, allow a person to suspend temporality and escape from the world of obligation.[39]

Buddhists often enter spaces of discipline and obligation in the form of monasteries, but they also enter spaces that are both Buddhist and that create feelings of pleasure and personal freedom. Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg write that to study affect is to study "accumulative *beside-ness*."

It is to study the accumulation of encounters—a "supple incrementalism." The senses accumulate images, feelings, scents, and sounds constantly. This accumulation is at once "intimate and impersonal." It is the slow accretion of knowledge in the form of nondiscursive impressions. It is not the systematic learning of facts, dates, titles, terms, narrative sequences, ethical standards, and logical progressions, but the body's "capacity to affect and be affected."[40] The Buddhist images, decorative items, visually complex walls or lush gardens at these sites, whether beautiful or grotesque, become, like ritual and music, repetitious affective encounters. They do not teach through narrative, but through immediacy. They keep a person in the moment of aesthetic enjoyment. They are "presentational rather than representational; they operate in the here and now."[41] I am particularly influenced by Eve Sedgwick's phenomenological approach. She argues that attending to texture (touch) and affect (feeling) in our approach to everyday experience "is to enter a conceptual realm that is not shaped by lack nor by commonsensical dualities of subject versus object or of means versus ends."[42] As we will see by looking at the work of these artists and architects, they were not particularly controlled by one political, intellectual, or overarching aesthetic conceptual framework. Even when they did have explicit objectives, they could not control the affective encounters that were created by the spaces they initiated. I assert that the affective encounters at Buddhist ecumenical leisure places are a neglected part of Buddhist daily life that have been excised from scholarly studies because they fall on the wrong side of the secular-religious divide. These affective encounters are a type of Buddhist learning, but they are more accessible and common than ethical arguments, philosophical treatises, and doctrinal formulations.

Local Optima

The third argument this book makes is, perhaps ironically, against the very idea of studying the lives of architects. One could assume that a study of individual buildings and the architects is a purely agent-based study. Biographies, whether of objects, places, or people, do have the tendency to promote the idea that there is such a thing as an independent entity and in turn make that person, place, or thing an ideal exemplar. Whether we study the five *khandhas* of Buddhist psychology or basic neurophysiology, we find ample evidence that there is no such thing as an independent agent. Every person, place, or thing is composite—made of many parts and dependent on things outside of control—oxygen, gravity, genetic heritage, farmers, teachers, and the kindness of strangers. Therefore, I want to avoid creating a series of exemplars or representatives, or reviving the "great man" approach to history, which posits that history is moved along by certain creative, tendentious, or trailblazing out-

liers. Instead I want to emphasize that by looking at individual agents we actu-
ally learn more about complex adaptive systems. A study of complex adaptive
systems sees agents as part of heterogeneous, dynamic, flexible, process-
oriented, and ever-changing synchronic and diachronic networks.[43] The ar-
chitects, buildings, and artworks I look at below are part of complex adaptive
systems, not just complicated ones. As computational modeling specialists
John Miller and Scott Page state, "Complexity is a deep property of a system,
whereas complication is not. A complex system dies when an element is
removed, but complicated ones continue to live on, albeit slightly compromised.
Removing a seat from a car makes it less complicated; removing a timing belt
makes it less complex (and useless). Complicated worlds are reducible, whereas
complex ones are not."[44] Much of this work on complex adaptive systems first
came out of early developments of the interdependent Erdős Rényi networks
and the Sznajd Model. These attempts to map highly complex social inter-
actions and decision making have influenced everything from polymer studies
and percolation theories to predicting voter patterns. Although I will leave the
construction of these models for mapping the world to my colleagues in sta-
tistics, engineering, mathematics, and political science, I think it is important
to understand that buildings, parks, museums, and the like are the products
of thousands of small decisions by many different people and not well-planned
and perfectly executed by lone geniuses. It is the complexity and many layers
of redundancy that prevent "cascading failures" in these large systems.

The world's largest metal animal statue, which holds a Buddhist
temple within its belly, is the brainchild of Braphai and Lek Wiriyaphan. With-
out their funding, vision, and, some might say, foolhardiness, it would have
never been built, enjoyed, or mocked. They are necessary parts of a complex
system that involved thousands of construction workers, artisans, ticket-
takers, security guards, custodians, accountants, and miners. If one ticket-
taker goes on vacation or stays home to tend her sick father, the statue
does not collapse or close. She makes it complicated; Braphai and Lek make
it complex.

Braphai and Lek or Kenzo Tange or Shi Fa Zhao or any other archi-
tect or artist in this book might be important parts of complex systems, but
they are not lone visionaries standing on a cliff peering over a vast sea with
their shoulders back and their faces to the wind. They are what I like to call
"in-between" agents. They are locally known in circles of architectural stu-
dents or Buddhist art enthusiasts. They are not world leaders, spiritual mas-
ters, or once-in-a-generation philosophers. In fact, many of them could be
called failures. As we will see, while many sites I will discuss are extremely
popular and, in some cases, profitable, many were ignored, never finished, or
abandoned. Some are ridiculed for being the follies of egocentric blowhards
or simply very expensive quackery. I think that if scholars focus only on ideal

agents, cultural exemplars, profound texts, and timeless creations, then we are missing the middling agents, who despite funding, creativity, and diligence, do not quite make it into the pantheon of greatness. These in-between agents are much more representative than the "great men" of history and teach us more about what is probable, not simply what is possible.

There is a problem with looking at agents through the approach of computational models designed by sociologists and social engineers: they have a tendency to focus on outcomes. Their systems model biological and mechanical behavior to produce solutions to issues of inefficiency, heat loss, reduced profits, or material stress. As a humanist, I have never been concerned much with outcomes. I practice a woefully inefficient and unprofitable craft. I am not really concerned (although I understand why other, more social-scientifically and managerially minded scholars would be) with studying ideal exemplars who successfully achieve optimal outcomes—great books, paradigm-shifting buildings, revolutionary theories, and inspirational epitaphs. I instead look at how certain agents "get stuck at local optima."[45] They settle on a series of small "goods" and abandon the optimal "perfects" that they initially wanted to reach in the end. We will see that several of the architects had their visions compromised by funding issues, local politicians, lack of materials, changing fashions, economic downturns, or the death of a spouse. Along the way, many agents have to develop alternative plans or, in computational-speak—"low-level adaptive algorithms"—and give up ideal outcomes or overarching models.[46] Sometimes lives and material creations are simply the product of a series of local optima. Architects have to settle on a series of local optima, as do buildings. Buildings are never places fixed in time—beginning at the golden-shovel ceremony or ending at the ribbon-cutting. Each is ever-evolving, going through its own series of local optima long after its architect is nothing but a name on a blueprint in a city's deed office.

However, even if these architects did not achieve their optimal outcomes and ran into seemingly endless and frustrating construction and design hiccups, they do show us something. They show us that monks are not always the prime movers of Buddhist art, practices, and ideas. Instead we find architects like Tadao Ando, who worked on several innovative Christian churches, homes, secular "meditation" spaces, and commercial buildings throughout the world, and inspired work on revolutionary Buddhist monastic architects.[47] The grand projects of Braphai and Lek or Suchat Kosonkitiwong have led to new ways of displaying art and history at monasteries. The lay designers of secular museums led to the very idea of having Buddhist museums both connected and disconnected to monasteries. Lay funders and business-people have influenced monks to build sculpture gardens or amusement parks in or near monasteries. The laity have often been and often are the drivers of Buddhism, but the few studies of lay Buddhism generally study "them" as

large groups and parts of mass movements, not as purposive and complex agents in complex systems. Laity don't simply bow down, follow, fund, and feed monks, but offer alternative ways of thinking about Buddhism as an ever-changing world religion.

Incipits

To provide evidence for the three arguments described above, I have separated the chapters into three types of public sites for Buddhist leisure activity: (1) monuments/memorials; (2) historical, educational, and amusement parks; and (3) museums.[48] As an organizing principle, I will look closely at the designers of three specific places and use their creations as the primary foci. The first chapter looks at the life of Kenzo Tange and his design of the Lumbini master plan to honor the birthplace of the Buddha in Southern Nepal. His work is compared to some other architects and their efforts to design Buddhist monuments and alternative monastic spaces. The second chapter focuses on the lives of Braphai and Lek Wiriyaphan, who worked together to create three massive Buddhist historical and amusement parks in Thailand. Their work will be compared to other sculpture gardens, "hell" parks, and entertainment complexes throughout Asia. The third chapter is a study of Shi Fa Zhao's continuing efforts to build a multipurpose "temple" in Singapore. I particularly look at his design of an ecumenical Buddhist museum, as well as other new Buddhist museums in Asia. Although I concentrate on these exemplars, I also mention a number of other places that fall into these categories; it soon becomes obvious that each site can play multiple roles and that many of these types overlap. I have tried to keep this book short—it could be considered an opening salvo to encourage other studies on Buddhist leisure culture, but also to encourage the study of other Buddhist pleasures like games, music, dance, comedy, and romance.

Each chapter serves, then—partly inspired by Italo Calvino's wonderful novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*—as *incipits,* or a series of beginnings to future studies written by others I hope more capable than I.[49] The study of architecture must always be in the form of incipit, I believe. Buildings, parks, and the material objects assembled in them are never simply the creation of the architect; they are changed by every new manager, repairperson, renovator, and visitor. Governments change, zoning laws are rewritten, and access roads are moved. The biography of a building is ever lengthening and being effected by the wind, the sun, and its occupants' heavy feet. I often wonder if George Hewitt, who in 1883 designed the rowhouse I live in, in Philadelphia, would be horrified or amused by what has happened to his creation 130 years later. A wooden arch from Kerala spans the rear courtyard, the coal chute has been replaced by a tankless water heater, and my son painted his

bedroom black. Gone are the rear "servant's" staircase, every old window casing, and, sadly, the original tiles in the downstairs bathroom. Iceboxes have been replaced by refrigerators and intimate discussions by television. Buildings have their own biographies. A person studying one of the buildings I describe below a century from now will undoubtedly be upset about my ideas and write a very different book, because in one hundred years the buildings in question will have changed radically or the spaces they occupy will have been replaced by something different entirely. It is my hope that in whatever form they end up, they will be used for as long as possible for leisure and even some, not so sacred, idleness.

Coming down from Star Peak

A little less than two years after I found myself looking down from inside the head of the giant statue of Guanyin/Kannon in the northern Japanese city of Sendai, I was looking up at a giant glass star in southern Japan. On top of a mountain in the rural area between Kobe and Osaka, a large glass assembly hall built in the shape of a star towers over the mountaintop and the adjacent Buddhist Nichiren monastery of Myōken. The hall, known as Star Peak of Seirei, is supposedly the earthly residence of the Bodhisattva Myōken, who represents the polestar as well as the Shinto Kami (god) of the mountain. Myōken is supposed to protect Japan from disasters, and this new glass assembly hall was built soon after Kobe's massive earthquake in 1995. This transparent and gleaming hypermodern structure stands in stark contrast to the monastery and the heavily forested area. The gently falling snow and the heavy mist at the base of the mountain the morning I visited added considerably to its otherworldliness, as it seemed to float above the clouds and sparkle like a snowflake. However, this ethereal feeling was soon wiped away by the laughter of children. Michael Feener, an old friend and a very helpful guide for this particular visit to Japan, informed me that the children running around were part of a "Beaver Troop," which is a type of Japanese boys' and girls' scout group that practices camping, learning about nature, and having fun. They were having snacks and throwing snowballs. As I walked up to the Star Peak hall we also saw young couples snuggling closely, enjoying the crisp air, and buying gifts at the two local gift stores, one run by a woman who was an intense San Francisco and Yomiuri Giants (baseball) fan and had her little shop on the monastery's grounds decorated with Giants' posters. The hall had another gift store where a group of children and adults were making crafts for the quickly approaching national Girls' Day celebration (Hinamatsuri).

The towering glass walls afforded us stunning views of the mountains and valleys and distant Inland Sea. As we looked up from the base of

The hall known as Star Peak
of Seirei, Mount Myōken

the hall we saw several new colorful sculptures of Jōgyō Bosatsu (Sanskrit: Viśiṣṭacārita Bodhisattva), the bodhisattva representing "superior practice" in the Lotus Sutra and of whom Nichiren is thought to be a reincarnation.[50] These statues were suspended from thin wires and, against the backdrop of the glass building and the sky, they looked as if they were floating upward. They were perfectly paired with the earthy and delicious bowls of curry udon in the monastery's restaurant.[51] The whole complex is more like a mountain lodge for weekend getaways than an isolated monastery. Indeed, we saw only one monk at the entire complex while we were there, and leisure activities like Beaver Troop meetings, small meals, and romantic strolls seem to far outweigh monastic ones. The architect, Shin Takamatsu, who is one of Japan's leading architects specializing in large office buildings and new commercial complexes, has branched out and built three structures at Buddhist monasteries, which I describe in subsequent chapters. The Star Peak though, I believe, is his masterpiece and, unlike the Sendai Daikannon, is still glistening. Takamatsu is one of many contemporary architects who have designed Buddhist leisure places across Asia. To some of their work we now turn.