

Templestay: Engaged Buddhism for Healing through Wellness Tourism

This presentation examines Templestay, a short-term retreat program held for laypersons at Buddhist monasteries, as a form of inclusive wellness tourism amid the happiness crisis in South Korea. The talk draws on ethnographic research and an examination of the history, statistics, marketing, and program content of Templestay. Challenging the polarized view that posits socially engaged Buddhism as the opposite of traditional monastic Buddhism, this study argues that Templestay demonstrates Buddhism's engagement with the prevailing psychological predicament of society and with people's aspiration and desperation to live a good life. Opening monasteries day and night for a standard fee, a way of formatting staying at temples as an experiential commodity, allows the distressed laity space for self-reflection and enhancement of their wellbeing. This study illuminates the latent potentialities of healing through a secularized retreat program at a religious site.