

Conspicuous Devotion: Competition in the Pagoda

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In Vietnam, Buddhist practice is optional and mostly attracts older women, whose children have grown and whose domestic responsibilities have diminished. For women in this situation Buddhism often becomes an important part of their identity. This paper will look at Buddhism as an identity marker and how Buddhist objects and activities become prominent parts of identity performances. At times their practice can involve the achievement of status within their group, marked by displays of religiosity, which I am calling "conspicuous devotion. Thus, while objects and activities are displayed to signify inclusion in the Buddhist group that becomes a corner stone in the shifting construction of identity, there is a level of competitiveness that arises in order to achieve status within the group.