

Social Representations of Buddhism on Turkish Newspapers

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Abstract

How is Buddhism represented on Turkish newspapers? This article aims to identify and analyze recurrent themes involving Buddhism on Turkish newspapers. The paper provides background information about the historical relationship between Buddhism and Turkish culture and the current situation of Buddhism in Turkey before delineating the method of the research study. To categorize and thematically interpret the social representations, 270 news texts were selected from one of the top Turkish newspapers after the duplicates were removed for a 12-year period between 2007 and 2018. 5 themes were extracted for further analysis. These were Buddhism as the religion of distant lands, Buddhism by the columnists, Buddhism in today's news, Buddhism in foreign news, and Buddhism and the celebrities. It was found that most of the Buddhism-related news selected for the study are positive except the ones on the situation in Myanmar. People who had an interest in Buddhism expected international Buddhist communities to voice their concerns about the conflicts in Myanmar so that Buddhism as a philosophy of peace would not be contaminated by tragic news from Myanmar. Nearly half of the news items about Buddhism were travelogues or columns. Buddhism is usually viewed as the religion or rather philosophy of the distant lands. That is why it is usually associated with travel. Turkish travel-writers are often positive about Buddhism, although their impressions are mostly superficial based on touristic observations of Buddhist monks, temples, art objects or Buddhist society at large. Secondly, Turkish columnists are mostly positive about Buddhism except the situation in Myanmar as mentioned above. In the remainder of the paper, the article presents and discusses Buddhism-related news under the categories of today's news, foreign news and celebrity categories. It is concluded that celebrity involvement with Buddhism is influential for the readers, while violence in Myanmar harms positive international image of Buddhism.

Keywords: Buddhism, social representations, Turkish news narratives, travelogues, and thematic analysis.

Türkiye Gazetelerinde Budizm'in Toplumsal Temsilleri

Özet

Budizm, Türkiye gazetelerinde nasıl temsil ediliyor? Bu makale, Türkiye gazetelerinde Budizm'e ilişkin olarak sıklıkla öne çıkan izlekleri tanımlamayı ve çözümlenmeyi amaçlıyor. Çalışma, araştırmanın yöntemine ilişkin ana hatları çizmeden önce Budizm ve Türk kültürü arasındaki

tarihsel ilişkiyle ilgili arka plan bilgileri sağlıyor. Toplumsal temsilleri ulamlamak ve izleksel olarak yorumlamak için, en üstteki Türk gazetelerinin birinden, aynı haberin yeniden basımları kapsam dışı bırakılarak, 2007-2018 arası 12 yıllık bir süre için 270 haber metni seçildi. Daha ayrıntılı bir çözümleme için 5 izlek ortaya çıkarıldı. Bunlar, uzak ülkelerin dini olarak Budizm, köşe yazarları açısından Budizm, günün haberlerindeki Budizm, dış haberlerdeki Budizm ve ‘ünlüler’ bağlamında Budizm idi. Çalışma için seçilmiş olan Budizm’e ilişkin haberlerin, Myanmar’daki durumla ilgili olanlar dışında çoğunun olumlu olduğu bulguları. Budizm’e belli bir ilgi duyan insanlar, uluslararası Budist topluluklarından Myanmar’daki çatışmalara ilişkin kaygılarını dile getirmelerini beklerdi ki bir barış felsefesi olarak Budizm Myanmar’dan gelen trajik haberlerle kirlenmesin. Budizm’e ilişkin haber metinlerinin neredeyse yarısı, gezi yazısı ya da köşe yazısı idi. Budizm, genellikle uzak ülkelerin dini ya da daha çok felsefesi olarak görülüyor. Bu nedenle o, çoğunlukla gezilerle ilişkilendiriliyor. Türk gezgin-yazarlar, izlenimleri daha çok rahipler, tapınaklar, sanat nesnelere ya da genel olarak Budist toplumuyla ilgili turistik gözlemlerine dayanan yüzeysel bir nitelikte olsa da Budizm’e ilişkin olarak genellikle olumlu bir bakışa sahipler. İkinci olarak, Türk köşe yazarları, yukarıda belirtildiği üzere, Myanmar’daki durum dışında, Budizm’e ilişkin olarak olumlular. Çalışmanın geri kalan bölümünde makale, Budizm’le ilgili haberleri, günün haberleri, dış haberler ve ünlüler ulamları altında sunuyor ve tartışıyor. Çalışmada, Budizm’e yönelik ünlü ilgisinin okurlar üstünde etkili olduğu, ancak Myanmar’daki şiddetin Budizm’e ilişkin olumlu uluslararası imgeye zarar verdiği sonucu çıkarılıyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Budizm, toplumsal temsiller, Türk haber anlatıları, gezi yazıları ve izleksel çözümleme.

Introduction

Buddhism and Turkey. These two words rarely appear together. Majority of the Turkish people are Muslim, however historically there were periods in which ancient Turks were Buddhists. Official Turkish historiography states that Turks originated in current Mongolia and north of Mongolia (currently part of Russian Siberia) (Ziyai, 2010). Xiongnu (Hun) people which was recorded in Chinese history as a barbaric people attacking China from the North and whose attacks led to the building of the Great Wall are considered to be the great ancestors of the current Turkish people according to the Turkish official historiography (Ziyai, 2010). Buddhification of ancient Turks starts at this period starting with the translations of Buddhist texts to Xiongnu language (Baykuzu, 2008). Later on by AD 4th century, a Uyghur historian Baykuzu (2008) based on ancient Chinese sources claims that Hun state adopted Buddhism as the official religion.

This account continues by Xiongnu’s transformation into Western Huns attacking Rome, led by Attila (Mangaltepe, 2011). By 5th century A.D., Göktürks appear in Mongolia and the north of Mongolia, leaving Orkhon inscriptions by 8th century. They had Buddhist temples according to Chinese monks visiting the country (Klimkeit, 1990; 2009).

Then comes the Uyghur state which was a Buddhist state. However Islamization by 11th century led to disappearance of Buddhism among ancient Turks. Nevertheless, a number of sutras and other documents written in Uyghur language with Turkish Buddhist tradition survived such as ‘Altun Yaruk Sudur’ which was the translation of ‘Golden Light Sutra’ (Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra, सुवर्णप्रभासोत्तमसूत्रेन्द्रराज) (Ayazlı, 2009; Karahan, 2013; Uçar, 2013a, 2013b; Zengin & Yaman, 2018). Other than that, researchers found ‘Lotus Sutra’ (सद्धर्मपुण्डरीक सूत्र Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra) (Yakup, 2011), some sections of a Mahayana sutra ‘Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment’ (圓覺經 *Yuánjué jīng* 원각경) (Zieme, 2016) and fragments of Abhidharmakośakārikā in Old Uyghur language (Kudara, 1986).

Currently, after more than a millennium of Islamization, settlement in Anatolia, and rise and collapse of various empires, Turks are quite different than their ancestors. This case is comparable to Korean, Chinese and Japanese who throughout history mostly settled in a particular region and evolved in a more stable way. Turks, although originally Asian, no longer have Asian eyes as a result of a millennium of interbreeding with other races; neither eat horse meat nor drink kumis (fermented horse milk drink which is alcoholic) as their ancestors did. However, the current Turkish language has obvious links with Uyghur and Hun languages. In summary, language did not change much, while genetically and culturally, Turks are quite different.¹

Official discourse states that 99% of Turkish people are Muslim, however that may not be true, as the number of atheists may be more than 1% alone. Furthermore, the way people experience Islam varies: For some citizens Islam is just a nominal tag. They don’t practice the religion, but they still keep their tag. While for some others, it is a way of life, more important than anything in life. Christianity is rare in Turkey. It may correspond to around 100,000 among a total population of 80 million people. Among Muslims, 1/3 or ¼ is estimated to belong to another sect which is called ‘Alevism’. Alevism differs from the official Sünni sects, by his different interpretation of the religious history, religious duties and principle, gender roles, social structure, ceremonies, religious sites (no mosques in Alevism), death beliefs, world views etc. They don’t enjoy the privileges assigned for the Sunnis; their sites of worship which are called as cemevi are not completely recognized as sites of worship yet, although they have a long history.

¹ Before we move onto our main topic, let us also correct a likely misunderstanding: Buddha in Old Turkic texts was called as ‘Burhan’ or ‘Burkhan’. Currently, ‘Burhan’ is a common Turkish name for boys. However, it is not because of the Buddhist meaning, it is because it means ‘evidence’ in Arabic and is associated with Islam.

Now we can talk about Buddhism and Turkey. Majority of the foreigners living in Turkey are Westerners that are not Buddhists. There are just a few Buddhists mostly foreigners living in Turkey. With increasing Chinese investments in Turkey, the number may increase. But it is not a religion that can organize to receive an official status in Turkey. Furthermore, there are legal prohibitions about funerals which force atheist or non-Muslim, non-Christian, non-Jewish Turkish citizens to be buried as if they are Muslim.

There is no Buddhist temple in Turkey except the one discovered in Eastern Turkey (in Ahlat district of Bitlis city) that was believed to be built by Mongolian Buddhist soldiers invading Anatolia from 13th to 15th centuries. The temple which has no record was built in a cave with lotus symbols (Savgin & Belli, 2017).

So how Turkish people would get to know about Buddhism is via TV and print news, documentaries about Buddhism, travel programs visiting predominantly Buddhist countries such as Thailand, Asian historical drama series featuring Buddhism, yoga centers which are increasing in numbers and relevant books. There are at least 40 books about Buddhism translated to Turkish which include Dalai Lama's, Thich Nhat Hanh's and Erich Fromm's books, as well as a few fiction works.² While most of Buddhism books in Turkish are translations, in the last couple years we observe an increase in the number of Turkish authors writing books about Buddhism in Turkish.

Within this context, in this study, we investigate the social representations of Buddhism on one of the most read newspapers of Turkey which is Hürriyet Newspaper. We haven't set any hypothesis, as it is the first study of its kind in Turkey, however we have certain expectations: For example, since there is no sizeable Buddhist population living in Turkey, we expect that the mention of Buddhism would be mostly by travel news and columnists rather than by other news categories.

Method

12 years of Hürriyet newspapers (August 2007 to August 2018) were searched with the word 'Budizm' which is 'Buddhism' in Turkish language. The search brought 307 news items. After eliminating the duplicates, we had a final number of 270 news items mentioning Buddhism. These news items are listed in Appendix 1 with their titles, links and dates.

The annual distribution of Buddhism-related news was as follows:

² See Kitapyurdu, an online book sale site in Turkish: https://www.kitapyurdu.com/kategori/kitap-din-budizm/1_64_72.html

Table 1. News Mentioning ‘Buddhism’ By Years (2007-2018)

| Year | Number of News Items Mentioning Buddhism | Percentages |
|-------|--|-------------|
| 2018 | 18 | 7% |
| 2017 | 39 | 14% |
| 2016 | 25 | 9% |
| 2015 | 21 | 8% |
| 2014 | 30 | 11% |
| 2013 | 33 | 12% |
| 2012 | 26 | 10% |
| 2011 | 9 | 3% |
| 2010 | 28 | 10% |
| 2009 | 15 | 6% |
| 2008 | 19 | 7% |
| 2007 | 7 | 3% |
| Total | 270 | 100% |

This showed that we had 22.5 news items per year mentioning Buddhism. The content varied a lot. 83 of the mentions were on travelogues (31%), 46 of them were by the columnists (17%); 6 of them was on sports pages (<1%), and all 3 videos hosted on newspaper’s website were uploaded by the chief editor of the newspaper featuring his visit to Buddhist sites in Bhutan. That should be considered as a positive sign for Buddhism. So our expectation is somewhat true: Nearly half of the news (31+17=48%) were either travel news or pieces penned by the newspaper’s columnists. In the next section, we conduct thematic analysis of the news items.

Results: Thematic Analysis

When we conducted thematic analysis over news texts mentioning Buddhism, we came across 5 themes. These are

- Buddhism as the Religion of Distant Lands

- Buddhism by the Columnists
- Buddhism in Today's News
- Buddhism in Foreign News
- Buddhism and the Celebrities

Table 2 portrays the distribution of the themes:

Table 2. Themes of News Texts Mentioning Buddhism

| Themes | Number of News Texts | Percentages |
|---|----------------------|-------------|
| Buddhism as the Religion of Distant Lands | 83 | 31% |
| Buddhism by the Columnists | 46 | 17% |
| Buddhism in Today's News | 46 | 17% |
| Buddhism and the Celebrities | 41 | 15% |
| Buddhism in Foreign News | 37 | 14% |
| Others | 17 | 6% |
| Total | 270 | 100% |

In the following subsections, we analyzed the contents under each theme.

Buddhism as the Religion of Distant Lands

In this section, we present and discuss the travelogues referring to Buddhism on the basis of geography for ease of analysis and presentation. The countries and regions (such as Tibet, Macao and Hong Kong) are alphabetically ordered. The chief editor's travelogues on Bhutan are presented first. The portrayals of Buddhism in these countries and regions are followed by those in other geographies.

Many of the Turkish travelers travel to learn about other cultures and religions such as Buddhism (for example, 08.09.2008). Some others are interested in Buddhism after seeing that Buddhists are happy and peaceful people despite of poverty (e.g. 07.07.2008). They are usually impressed by Buddhist art and positive qualities of Buddhist societies such as respect for others including transsexuals in Thailand, and all living beings in general (e.g. 12.11.2007b). In an article about what to do and not to do in foreign countries, it is stated that one can't touch other's head, as the arch-spirit is residing in one's head (10.04.2018), whereas in another piece the

cultural differences in Buddhist and Hindu interpretation of hand gestures are mentioned (11.01.2017).

A travelogue is dedicated to introduction of Buddhism to Turkish readers through a trip from India to Nepal (16.04.2015). The Turkish traveler plans to travel from New Delhi train station to Mahabodi Temple, at Bodh Gaya, Bihar State, India which the writer-traveler mention as Buddha's birthplace in contrast to Gautama's birthplace. The writer-traveler explains that this is where Gautama was enlightened to become Buddha. He follows the traces of Buddha in this journey like a pilgrimage. However he makes a mistake in his description of Buddhism: For example, he says the stupa at Vulture Peak (Gijjhakuta) is the site in which Buddha was imprisoned. Traveler's next destinations are Sarnath which was the site of Buddha's first sermon and Lumbini. He visits the museum at Sarnath and see the most beautiful Buddha sculpture there according to him. In Lumbini, Gautama's birthplace he sees lots of Buddhist pilgrims. He calls Buddha as an exalted man, a man of peace. His next destination is Kushinagar, Buddha's parinirvana site, and final destination is Sravasti. At the end, the traveler states that this was Mahaparinirvan Express which is a tour for Buddhist pilgrimage covering 3,000 km, including Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar. The article concludes by Buddha's 8 Fold Path and 4 Noble Truths.

Chief Editor's Travelogues on Bhutan

Chief Editor's visit to Bhutan in 2013 has been featured by three videos and a number of travelogues. In a video (01:42), chief editor is seen in Buddhist gown in a Bhutanese temple (16.11.2013). He is praying and eating with priests. In his second video (02:05), he explains that white is the color of mourning and death in Buddhism, whereas in Turkey, white symbolizes peace or neutrality and black symbolizes mourning and death (17.11.2013a). However, chief editor reminds us, the dead are wrapped with white clothes in Turkey. So he asks "why is it black for 'outside', white for 'inside'... For him, white fits with death better, as it makes death less fearful, more peaceful and more humane. "For Buddhists" he continues, "death is not as bad as the case in our culture. For Buddhism, death is something like a normal course of events" (17.11.2013a).

In his travelogues, he explains why he decided to 'take refugee' for a week in Bhutan: That was because he was tired of the tyrannical state getting more and more interfering to his life, choking him as such (17.11.2013b). He discovered Bhutan one day when he saw a picture. He

learned that Bhutan proposed the notion of Gross National Happiness rather than Gross National Product. In this country, unlike his country, religious belief was not a tool of repression, but emancipation. This country was investigating how to increase happiness. As a citizen of a country in which happiness declines by economic growth he wanted to know more about Bhutan. Then he saw the photo of Paro Taktsang Temple and fascinated. He decided to travel to Bhutan (17.11.2013b). In this first article, the chief editor describes Bhutan in detail. He was interested in Buddhism, he had some idea about the philosophy, but nevertheless that was his first encounter with Buddhism. In the last decade or so, he was thinking about retreating to a monastery like a Buddhist monk. It was more like a feeling of leaving, prevalent among ‘all of us’. It was also due to the deep disillusionment with monotheistic religions that couldn’t do anything against terror, sectarian violence, war, civil war etc. in the last decade. We can also add, he states, due to the repressive government.

Chief Editor states that some temples in Bhutan have small doors, so that you bow to enter. This, he explains, is also a part of respect for Buddha (17.11.2013b). While others pray in religious languages, he prays in Turkish thinking about his wishes. He likens the monastery experience of children to Islamic schooling. They have their meal in a very primitive (belonging to the Middle Ages) kitchen according to his account. This is where it would be the first time for him to have meal by his hand which is very difficult for him. He then realizes that some boys eat with spoon and fork. Surprisingly, they eat yak and cow meat with rice (17.11.2013b). Another difficulty for him is in sitting cross-legged. Interestingly, this may be one of the indicators that can distinguish modern Turks from conservative ones. Due to early age religious training the latter is accustomed to sit cross-legged, while that is not the case for modern ones unless they had studied dancing or martial arts.

In the second part of his travelogue he talks about a boy from Bhutan who was especially chosen by Indian Buddhists (18.11.2013). After 22 years he visits his home. Chief Editor talks with him. He is believed to have 16 lives. He finds a similarity between Bhutanese Buddhism and Turkish folk religion: Tying rags to trees. This is done in Turkey especially by young women who want to get married or pregnant. He explains the meanings of Buddhist colors and flags. He shortly narrates the story of how Gautama became Buddha. He uses the expressions, “the Sun of the East” and “the Light of the World” for Buddha (18.11.2013).

The second part of his travelogue starts with exaltation of Bhutanese princess (the father king's sister) as she helps her people as a lay person. In fact they had seen her earlier in the trip, but she was so modest that she did not introduce herself as the princess (19.11.2013). He notices one more time that the houses, even Princess' house, are not heated which would possibly have a religious reason, rather than a monetary one; otherwise richer could be able to afford heaters. He admires the Princess and her charity works especially in health areas. He identifies one good and one bad point about Bhutanese Buddhism: Unlike the European's Asian stereotypes, Bhutan is always on time. If the event will be at 6:00, it exactly takes place at 6:00. However, the society is still patriarchal (19.11.2013). He senses strongest sorrow in women's monastery. At the end of the day, the chief editor reflects on his daily experience and concludes that Buddhism is better than monotheistic religions. He feels that he can be a Buddhist.

On the third day of his travelogue he reflects on his own beliefs (23.11.2013). He describes himself as a modern, secular Muslim. His ties with Islam, he states, never satisfied Muslim conservatives. He believed in Islam but never became a fundamentalist. However the rise of Islamic fundamentalism extended the distance between him and Islam. With these complicated religious feelings, he adds, he landed on Bhutan. But then he writes "don't worry mom, your son is still a Muslim" (23.11.2013). But his feelings and ideas are really mixed. Later on, in the same section, he likens the darkness of the Tiger's Nest Cave to the darkness of the current state of Islam. This part concludes by 2 great sins, 5 great poisons and 5 noble qualities in Buddhism (23.11.2013).

On the fourth day of his travelogue, chief editor generally compares his experience in Islamic pilgrimage at Hajj and his current Buddhist experience (20.11.2013a). He then explains various meanings of 108 in Buddhism. He visits Punakha Dzong (palace) and states that "this is the Vatican of Bhutanese Buddhism". He mentions the calendar of 12 animals, matches Turkish politicians and himself, and his companions in the calendar, but does not describe the meanings (20.11.2013a).

On the fifth day of his travelogue, he visits a Buddhist crematorium (21.11.2013). He identifies three parts: The one for traditional rituals, the one for modern procedures and the one for the monks. He learns the meaning of penis in Bhutanese Buddhism and quite surprised. He compares it with 'nazar boncuğu' which is the lucky charm object in Turkish culture. Then he describes the notion of Gross National Happiness. Another surprising observation for him was

lack of traffic police and traffic lights in Bhutan. He explains how stupas are used to guide the traffic. This is also shown in the third video (01:40) (20.11.2013b).

On the sixth and final day of his travelogue, he visits Tiger Nest's Monastery and enthralled with its beauty (22.11.2013). He narrates the story of Patmasambava. He then describes 6 realms of Buddhism.

Bhutan

In an article listing world's 7 most beautiful temples, Bhutan's Paro Taktsang Temple is mentioned:

"The monastery that was built at 3,800 m.-high mountain at Paro Valley was called as 'Tiger's Nest'. The landscape that awaits you after an arduous climb is fascinating.

This sacred temple of Himalaya Buddhists was built in 1692. It is narrated that this point was decided for temple construction, because it was believed that the scholar who brought Buddhism to Bhutan had meditated here for 3 years."

Cambodia

A piece that lists 21 best countries to see according to National Geographic mentions Cambodia as a country oscillating between a bloody past and Buddhism (07.12.2017). Another piece lists Cambodia as one of the destinations to visit on November, and state that 95% of Cambodian people believe in Theravada Buddhism (12.11.2012).

China

In a travelogue about Huangshan Mountain, its significance for Buddhism is mentioned (16.08.2018), while an article on Yangshuo mentions lotus as the sacred flower of Buddhism (02.11.2009). In another, the traveler shortly describes the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves in a paragraph (13.10.2014b). Although information he provides is not completely correct or accurate, he states that the artworks in the caves are unique. Another traveler writes about Mogao Caves and provides general information about the Buddhist artworks in the caves (07.10.2013).

An article describes in detail Sêrtar County, a town in China's Sichuan which is famous for 40,000 residents who are Buddhist monks (02.12.2017). It is depicted as a dreamlike place, surreal place, and the best place to live. Its prohibitions are also mentioned. It is stated that the largest Buddhist school in the world is in Sêrtar. Another travelogue featuring Sichuan again presents Wenshu Monastery at Wenshuyuan, Chengdu, Sichuan (17.08.2015). Wenshu is mentioned as the most outstanding and active site of Buddhism in China. The monastery is

described in a paragraph with the following conclusion: “(...) however the most impressive part of the monastery is its garden. The koi ponds under shadows, pagodas, statue-turned rocks bring peace for gray-haired visitors.”

Hong Kong

In a list of 10 places to see in the Far East, Hong Kong’s Tian Tan Temple is listed as a site to discover Buddhist philosophy (26.12.2016). Another piece states (18.02.2016): “For traces of Buddhism, you can go to Lantau Island and visit Tian Tan Buddha and Po Lin Monastery”.

India

In two articles about India it is stated that Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism originated from India (15.11.2017; 06.05.2016). On 24.07.2018’s newspaper, in a travelogue about Ladakh region, the moot information that Buddhism arrived from Tibet to Ladakh is mentioned. A piece about Kumbh Mela festival mentions that Buddhism lost over Hinduism in India (19.04.2010).

Indonesia

A travelogue on Bali mentions Hinduism and Buddhism as the main religions influencing the Balinese culture (03.05.2010b), while in another about Bali, the symbolic meaning of lotus in Buddhism (purity, fidelity and spiritual awakening) is stated (12.08.2018; 14.08.2018).

Japan

In an article on Japan, Japanese Buddhist temples are mentioned as the most fascinating and splendid ones in the world (17.03.2017), while another article mentions Buddhism as one of the inspirational sources of Japanese cinema (12.12.2016b). In another article, the writer-traveler shares his fascination about Shikoku’s 88 Buddhist temples (19.03.2012). Shikoku pilgrimage is described in detail. It is stated that Buddhist pilgrims’ voyage can take 45-50 days by daily speed of 24 km. She was quite impressed by local people’s solidarity for the pilgrims known as ‘o-settai’. In her conclusion, she narrates the life story of Kōbō-Daishi (弘法大師) also known as Kūkai (空海) (774-835), the founder of the Shingon sect (19.03.2012).

Laos

A travelogue on Laos attributes smiling faces, calmness and respect to Buddhist philosophy (14.04.2017), while another describes ordinary life in Luang Prabang mentioning thousands of Buddha sculptures (02.03.2009). A third one states that 60% of the people in Laos are Buddhists (12.11.2007b).

Macao

In an article on Macao, Buddhism is listed as the most common religion in Macao (29.03.2017).

Malaysia

In a piece about Penang Island, Buddhism is mentioned as one of the religions that can be observed on streets.

Mongolia

A traveler visiting Naadam festival states that Mongolia adopted Buddhism (01.07.2013).

Myanmar

In a list covering 10 most exotic places of the world, Myanmar is mentioned with the comment that one can learn about every aspect of Buddhism, as people have close ties with Buddhism (11.01.2017). An article describes with awe the Buddhist temples and Buddha sculptures of Myanmar in full detail (18.06.2012). Criticizing the political situation of the country, it is stated that there are only two TV channels that are on, all the time: One about football, another about Buddhism (18.06.2012). She is fascinated with Bagan Archeological Zone, which includes thousands of Buddhist temples; Shweinbin Monastery in Mandalay, U Min Thonze Temple in Sagaing and Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon (18.06.2012). She says “people meditating, bells and cymbal sounds, those venerating and washing the animal that is the symbol of their birth day [in fact it should be year], incenses burnt, the candles lit will take your mind” (18.06.2012). Another traveler who stayed in temples for 2 weeks in Myanmar mentions Kyaikhtiyo Pagoda (at Mon State, aka Golden Rock) which has a weak rock foundation that is about to fall. For Buddhists, traveler adds, this pagoda symbolizes balance and moderateness; however women are not allowed to enter as they are believed to disrupt the world’s balance (14.01.2008).

Nepal

In a piece about Nepal, it is stated that Buddha was born in Lumbini, Nepal in 623 B.C. which is a wrong date (22.03.2018). The article asks in its title whether Nepal is the motherland of Buddhism or not. In an article asking which countries are the best for yoga and meditation, Nepal among many others is listed and designated as a country in which the life philosophies are Hinduism and Buddhism (06.02.2018; 12.11.2012). Buddha’s eyes on Budhanath Stupa and their

meaning is mentioned in another piece (03.05.2017). In another piece about Nepal, it is stated that

“Boudhanath Stupa is considered to be the center of Buddhism in Kathmandu, only Buddhist monks can step in the temple. The visitors only look at the Stupa from outside. According to the Buddhist belief, there are 108 evils that people should get rid of, that is why Buddhists believe that they would go to paradise when they circle the Stupa 108 times” (26.01.2018).

A female writer who published a book about Nepal after 11 years of residence in Nepal explains and describes the importance and significance of Boudhanath Stupa and how Buddha’s birthday (Buddha Jayanti) is celebrated in Nepal (03.05.2010a). A Turkish woman who climbed to Himalayas states that they joined a Buddhist ritual in Tengboche Monastery, Khumjung, Nepal, and frequently encountered Buddhist symbols on the way to Himalayas (20.04.2014). They added: “‘Om mani padme hūm’ (ॐ मणिपद्मे हूँ) and nature flags with red fire and blue sky were everywhere; you could see the influence of Buddhism everywhere.”

Philippines

In an article about Bohol Island, Buddhism is mentioned as one of the minority religions in the country (10.09.2012).

South Korea

A traveler visits Jogyesa Temple in her journey to Seoul and notes the lotus lanterns around the temple which were for Buddha’s birthday (07.06.2010), while another traveler visits Beomeosa Temple in Busan (05.05.2008).

Sri Lanka

In an article about Sri Lanka, it is stated that majority of the Sri Lankan are Buddhists, the most important Buddhist temple of the country is Dalada Maligawa at Kandy City which houses Buddha’s tooth, and the Buddhist cuisine is vegetarian (22.10.2017b).

Taiwan

In a piece for vegans, Taiwan is mentioned as a site where both meat restaurants as well as Buddhist restaurants can be found (25.04.2018).

Thailand

In three articles, Bangkok in particular and Thailand in general is considered to be the symbolic capital of Buddhism. The colorful culture of Bangkok is attributed to Buddhism

(04.06.2018) while Thai people are depicted to be incredibly loyal to the king and Buddhism (25.05.2018; 20.05.2013; 07.04.2012a), and respect is considered to be the foundation of Buddhism (02.12.2017a). Usually temple and Buddha photos accompany Bangkok and Thailand travelogues. In another article which lists 10 reasons to go to Thailand, it is written that the majority of the Thai people are Buddhist, there are Buddhist temples in the country that are extraordinarily beautiful, and Thailand is a country where one can explore Buddhism (12.09.2017). In another piece, among 10 reasons to spend the long public holiday in Phuket, one of them is about Buddhism: One can visit Phuket to explore and discover Buddhism which has a peculiar philosophy, through the temples in Phuket (10.08.2017). Another travelogue mentions Chiang Mai as a center of Buddhism; the traveler states that he had an overnight journey in a train full of Buddhist monks (16.02.2016). According to a Turkish photographer, Thailand is a country in which the traces of Buddhism can be seen in every spheres of life (25.07.2015). This is shared by another traveler which also adds that the belief in reincarnation is common in Thailand (02.08.2010). In another piece, Thailand is wrongly mentioned as the birthplace of Buddhism (26.09.2014). Another traveler points out the fact that some of the festivals in Thailand predates the Buddhism era (24.11.2008).

In an interview with a Turkish couple traveling the world, they comment on Buddhism within the context of Thailand (20.04.2016): “Buddhism was quite impressive. Think about a religion that has points of view that can neither be seen in Europe nor our country [Turkey] and all those people adopt the religion as a lifestyle. It was quite interesting.”

Tibet

An article mentions Tibet as the birthplace of Buddhism (which is wrong) (27.05.2015). Another traveler visiting Tibet quotes from her guide: “There is neither God, paradise nor hell in Buddhism. If you are bad you come to the world again, if you are good you reach nirvana. In fact Buddhism is a moral code rather than a religion” (09.09.2003).

Vietnam

Buddhism is mentioned as one of the components of an eclectic Vietnamese religion in one of the pieces (04.02.2013). In general, explorations of Vietnamese Buddhism in Turkish are limited as the focus of tourism for example is mostly on the war or natural sites. Gezgin (2017a; 2017b) provides full detailed presentation of Vietnamese Buddhist temples with photos. Furthermore, Vietnamese Buddhism appears as the major theme in some of his fictional works:

In Gezgin (2015) he narrated the story of a monk who became a sculptor at the Marble Mountain of Danang ('Ngũ Hành Sơn' in Vietnamese), which is deemed as a sacred site for Buddhists with its temples and caves. Gezgin (2014a) and Gezgin (2014b) are about Buddhism and the Marble Mountains.³

Buddhism in Other Geographies

A traveler visits Tuva Turks who are reportedly the leading Buddhist Turkish ethnicity except Yellow Uyghurs (29.07.2013), while another visiting Mongolia briefly writes about them (01.07.2013). Their region is currently a part of the Russian 'Far East', north of Mongolia. They were converted to Buddhism lately and firmly. In fact, the traveler reports, their religious beliefs and practices are a mix of Buddhism, Shamanism, animism, tengrism etc. Finally, another article traces the relics of Hinduism and Buddhism in the buildings in Durban, South Africa (21.11.2017).

Buddhism by the Columnists

One of the discussions about yoga in Turkey was the following: Islamic conservative critiques stated that it is a part of a religion and should be banned, while others (e.g. 24.10.2017) rightly claimed that yoga's history predates Buddhism's. However, the logical error is in the assumption that anything religious other than Islam had to be banned. Another piece compares the notion of Islamic terrorism and an imaginary case of Buddhist terrorism (22.10.2017c). In the latter case, the columnist claims, Buddhists would say "this is not real Buddhism", thus he concludes, we should avoid the term 'Islamic terrorism' because, terrorism does not originate from religions, but ideologies. However, the columnist can't explain why we don't have even

³ Other than these, Gezgin has been introducing Buddhism in general and Buddhist philosophy in particular for Turkish readers in various genres since 2003, the year he encountered with Buddhism for the first time (in Thailand): Gezgin (2007a) is a Buddhist opera libretto of love and journey also featuring Buddha for advice. Other than Vietnamese Buddhism, he had written about Buddhism in Thailand (Gezgin, 2003a), Bhutan (Gezgin, 2007b) and Kalmykia (Gezgin, 2006) which is considered to be the only Buddhist country in Europe. Among his poems, Gezgin (2003b) was a fictionalized and simplified sermon of Buddha, Gezgin (2010) is a bunch of kōans for a Buddhist girl, while Gezgin (2017c) is a poetical description of a journey to Thousand Buddha Caves. Other than these, he published two scholarly articles on Buddhist economics (Gezgin, 2008; Gezgin, 2007b), and a detailed article on Buddhist cinema in which he presented and discussed 13 Buddhist films from different countries (Gezgin, 2017d). Finally, he penned articles for daily newspapers and websites about various topics related to Buddhism such as Jainism and Buddhism (Gezgin, 2011), Thousand Buddha Caves (Gezgin, 2016), why Vietnamese Buddhists supported Uncle Ho during the Vietnamese-American War (Gezgin, 2017e), and the fact that the violence and massacres in Myanmar had nothing to do with Buddhism but fascism (Gezgin, 2017f; Gezgin, 2017g).

such a term (i.e. ‘Buddhist terrorism’).⁴ On the other hand, in an earlier piece, a conservative columnist of the newspaper states the following:

“Is there jihad in Buddhism? Are there military empires in Buddhism? But Buddhist state of Myanmar unmercifully oppress 1 million Arakan Muslims who didn’t shoot anybody” (07.08.2012).

[However the columnist confuses Buddhism and Hinduism in the next sentence:]

“The rise of Buddhist nationalism in India which is an example of different identities living in peace makes everybody anxious” (07.08.2012).

The chief editor who had visited Bhutan 4 years ago shortly states that although the most peaceful religion is Buddhism, this image is shattered into pieces in Myanmar (03.09.2017). In another piece, he reminds his readers that from his Bhutan journey, he learned that the greatest sins were arrogance and lie, while the most important humane feeling is compassion. These two sin words are very common in Turkey, he complains (10.06.2014). In another piece, he talks about jazz musicians who became Buddhist (10.07.2011). Likewise, in a number of articles, it is stated that a celebrity is Buddhist (e.g. Leonard Cohen in 01.08.2009; Steve Jobs in 14.10.2011).

Another columnist share a quote from Lañkāvatāra Sūtra and connects it with Islamic teaching (23.07.2017). The same columnist in an earlier piece introduces Zen Buddhism to his readers with a positive tone, quoting from 2 books on Zen (11.05.2014). A columnist shortly talks about Dalai Lama with a positive tone (08.10.2016), in another piece he introduces Soka Gakkai with a few sentences (19.10.2014). In a philosophical column about death, a columnist quotes 4 Noble Truths (09.03.2014), while a columnist briefly talks about the meaning of lotus in Buddhism (21.11.2009).

Another columnist criticizes misuse of Buddhism in resumes of medicine conman as a marketing technique (12.07.2018). Similar to this warning, we see commercialization of Buddhism through sale of Buddhist ornamental objects at exorbitant prices in a Turkish luxury market (22.05.2010) which, we think, is against the true nature of Buddhism.

In an article comparing modernization in Turkey and Japan, a columnist discusses the role of Buddhism in Japanese culture and modernization (18.04.2010). Another columnist shortly introduces Jainism to her readers and states that it is similar to Buddhism in certain respects

⁴ But the news on atrocities in Myanmar easily associated Buddhism with massacres. International Buddhist communities had to be more active to dissociate Arakan atrocities and Buddhism.

(22.10.2017a). In another piece, the columnist proposes that religious education in Turkey should cover not only Islam but major religions of the world including Buddhism (08.02.2012).

Overall, except the situation in Myanmar, the Turkish columnists are positive about Buddhism. They associate Buddhism with wisdom, peace and tranquility.

Buddhism in Today's News

In the last 3 years, Turkish media continuously portrayed a Buddhist Vietnamese woman living in Turkey. This woman was a widow of a Turkish policeman. Her Buddhist way of mourning in the funeral and afterwards drew attention and interest in Buddhism (24.07.2015). According to the Muslim funeral tradition, the coffin is carried on the back of the funeral car without anybody accompanying the coffin. However, in Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, the coffin is carried on the back of the highly ornamented funeral car with relatives. Following Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, the widow lied next to the coffin, which was unusual in Turkey (24.07.2015). This was interpreted as the wife's loyalty to husband, and TV viewers cried watching the scenes. The widow rather than returning to Vietnam, stayed in Turkey to keep her husband's memory alive in a Buddhist and Muslim way (27.03.2018). She burns incense for the deceased which is not a Muslim tradition.

Other than that, when Buddhist celebrities and experts on Buddhism visit Turkey, that becomes today's news (19.01.2018, 30.11.2017, 15.09.2017, 27.05.2017). Recently, however, as stated above, Buddhism became today's news because of atrocities in Myanmar and Turkish protests against them (31.08.2017). The Turkish protestors state that Buddhist religion which was promoted as a philosophy of compassion and illumination by the West in the last century is not what it appears to be. This is proven, they claim, by the atrocities in Myanmar (31.08.2017).

In another piece, Buddhism shortly appears as one of the beliefs related to winter solstice traditions. "According to Buddhism", the text says, "pomegranate is considered to be the essence that combines all the good qualities of life, and those who have pomegranate at home is believed to be away from evil and attains abundance" (21.12.2016). In another news, the sisterhood agreement between a district of Istanbul and China's Taizhou City (Zhejiang) which is considered as one of the centers of Buddhism in China is featured (13.11.2015).

As stated in the previous section, there was a discussion about whether yoga is a Buddhist practice or a non-religious practice. In 2015, Turkish government, reviewing this discussion banned Buddha sculptures, incense, Buddhist music, mantras, religious objects and paintings etc.

in yoga centers (09.09.2015). This was protested by Turkish celebrities who have been involved in yoga. One of them says, “neither yoga nor Buddhism are religions, they are philosophies”, while another says “it is not true that those doing yoga are Buddhists” etc. (09.09.2015). The same news text ends by a brief history of yoga, the description of its stress-relieving properties and the mentioning of a few celebrities who do yoga (09.09.2015).

In another text published during Islamic month of fasting (also known as Ramadan), fasting traditions in other religions are described including fasting in Buddhism (17.06.2015). The article considers fasting as a reflection of the idea of Middle Way or moderation which means neither self-harm at one extreme nor hedonism at the other extreme (17.06.2015).

In 2015, Buddhism was also remembered with humor in Turkey: Islamic government has been building mosques or other Islamic ritual sites in all university campuses. For some people, this was against the idea of a university which is expected to be home of science, rather than religion. A university, it was proposed, had to be at equal distance to all religions. When a university needs new buildings, labs etc., the priority, the argument goes, can't be the mosques. Furthermore, other religions were not taken into account as they match tiny minorities in Turkey. As a response to this trend, students in a Turkish university initiated a petition asking for construction of a Buddhist temple in their university (06.04.2015, 28.03.2015). They had collected 20,000 signatures from non-Buddhists, as a form of protest. Their humorous reasons for signing were the following: “I want a peaceful site where I can read Tripitaka and Mahayana Sutras”, “for my religious needs, the closest temple is 2,000 km. far. I can't go there during lunch breaks.” “A small temple is fine as well. We are just a few Buddhists” etc. (28.03.2015). In a serious interview, they explain why they chose Buddhism and why they want a Buddhist temple: “We chose Buddhism, because Buddhism is a religion that everybody would feel closer and anti-Buddhism would not gain support. We do yoga, but we don't know much about Buddhism. That is why we chose Buddhism” (06.04.2015). The result was not positive. The campaigners were threatened, and the temple was not built, although funding was secured to build a giant temple, according to the campaigners (06.04.2015).

Finally, from a completely different perspective, a radical Islamist historian likened Turkish Republic founder, Atatürk's sculptures in Turkey to Buddha sculptures in Asia. He claims that both are forms of idolatry, thus they should be dismantled (18.08.2015). This is the same mentality which led to destruction of Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan.

Buddhism and the Celebrities

Regardless of whether celebrity news about Buddhism is intentional or not, this kind of news contributes to an increasing interest in Buddhism as the celebrities act as role models for some of the readers, and some others closely follow them with curiosity.

A peculiar case about celebrity news related to Buddhism in Turkey was related to Tuğçe K., a celebrity known by multiple conversions to various religions (16.08.2014). She became Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Muslim again respectively. Currently the public opinion treats her with humor due to her multiple conversions, and her tweets, for example, are not taken seriously. She had joined a small Buddhist group with 40 members including professors, doctors and engineers in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district. The community asked her to serve tea and clean the toilets until she would resolve her ego. She complied with what she was asked to do, and in addition, sold her luxury items. Her Buddhist master told her: "now you are nothing, but by passing various stages starting from this one, you will attain eternal peace" (06.01.2010a; 06.01.2010b). In this news text, it is also mentioned that "Richard Gere, Sting, Tina Turner, Harrison Ford, Oliver Stone, Herbie Hancock [and] Courtney Love" were worldwide celebrities with an interest in Buddhism (06.01.2010a; 06.01.2010b). The news text ends with a brief description of Buddhism (06.01.2010a; 06.01.2010b). It is implied that due to her turbulent love affairs, she couldn't find happiness, that is why she turned to Buddhism (06.01.2010a; 06.01.2010b). But ultimately she rejected the tasks of tea making and toilet cleaning; as a result, group members asked her to leave the group. She as such left Buddhism (26.07.2010; 02.03.2010).

In an interview, French football player Sebastien Frey, a well-known goal keeper in Turkey states that he is a Buddhist and explains how he became Buddhist (when they said "your career is over due to health problems", Buddhism lifted him from darkness, he recovered, returned to football and adopted Buddhism.) "However" he adds "I am open to learning different cultures and religions" (31.10.2013). Another football celebrity, Erik Gerets states that "[a]fter ending my career, I would like to travel extensively and buy an old house near the river and live there. The first place I would like to visit is Tibet. It is a country with so many beauties. Buddhism is a beautiful religion. People want to be good for others. I would like to be Buddhist. But I have many deficiencies" (11.10.2008).

In 2012, it was declared that a well-known Euro-Turkish football player became Buddhist while playing in Thailand. His career was over due to cocaine addiction. He went to Thailand to play there, but couldn't do anything due to his addiction (26.09.2012). Later on, his brother and uncle had press release stating that he didn't become Buddhist, he is still a Muslim, but he is applying Buddhist methods to get rid of his bad habits. The press release was neither negative nor positive about Buddhism, but the news of the press release was presented with objective facts about Buddhism (27.09.2012b).

Another celebrity to return to Buddhism to get rid of bad habits was Tiger Woods, a famous golf player (07.03.2010; 20.02.2010). Although he was a Buddhist, because of his sexual addiction, he almost ended his career. In another news, the journalists asked Dalai Lama whether he knew Tiger Woods after his decision, but he didn't, "I am sorry, I am not interested in sports" he said (22.02.2010). This was surprising for the journalists, but it should be deemed normal in another sense. Secondly, here was the irony about Tiger Woods: Before the sex scandals, critiques likened him to Buddhist monks in terms of the way he concentrated in golf. He himself was saying that he got his discipline from Buddhism (21.06.2008). However it appears that he applied Buddhist discipline to his job only, but not his lifestyle.

In another piece, A 21 year-old Thai porn star who had been converted from Christianity to Buddhism states that the conversion brought her luck, as she found the love of her dreams (a 70 year-old millionaire), and Buddhism made her life meaningful (31.10.2016). The reverse can also be reported, and in fact this kind of news is reported frequently in more conservative Turkish newspapers: The news that a Malaysian Playboy girl who was interested in Christianity and Buddhism was converted to Islam is such an example (05.07.2014).

In another piece, in commemoration of a deceased Turkish musician, one of the points to remember about him was his interest in Zen Buddhism (18.10.2017). In an interview another Turkish musician who didn't want to be buried after death, but burned was asked whether she was a Buddhist or not. Her response was negative (10.04.2012, 09.04.2012). In a piece about celebrities' interesting religious beliefs, Orlando Bloom, an English actor is said to be Buddhist (a member of Soka Gakkai) (08.08.2017). Another piece associates David Bowie's interest in Buddhism with his life philosophy of being born again and again (11.01.2016).

In a piece describing the house of a famous DJ, it is stated that the design of the entrance of the house was inspired by Buddhism (21.01.2016). In another article, a celebrity couple opens

their house to paparazzi journalists which find Buddhist objects in the house. This is explained by the couple's interest in Buddhism (03.03.2008). In another interview, a Turkish film director who was educated in Japan expresses his interest in Buddhism (26.09.2009). Likewise, in an interview, John McLaughlin, a musician shares his interest in Buddhism (29.12.2013). Another piece describes a Turkish celebrity visiting Kathmandu in Buddhist robes. The reporter mistakenly reports that people around her thought that she was Buddha due to her makeup and robes, and thus exceptionally respected her (02.08.2017).

Finally, a well-known politician talks about Buddhist-Muslim conflict in Myanmar without naming the country. According to him, the problem is that Buddhists can't tolerate Muslims and force them to leave (02.09.2017). In another piece, he names the conflict, talks in similar lines and then blames nearby Muslim countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan, as they didn't help Arakan Muslims much, according to him (01.09.2017).

Buddhism in Foreign News

Under this category, we identify a number of negative and positive news about Buddhism. We start with the negative ones: One of the news under this category was about a British tourist who was held in custody and ultimately got deported in Sri Lanka due to her tattoo about Buddha (17.11.2017a; 17.11.2017b). A 'scandalous' news involving a Thai Buddhist monk was another news under this category (03.03.2015). In another scandal-associated news, it is mentioned that one of the Thai princesses whose nude photos in her pet's birthday party appeared on public outlets will renounce royal titles and study Buddhism (13.12.2014). Another news text features the raping of Japanese students by Indian gangs that partially took place at Bodh Gaya (03.01.2015). As stated before, this was the site where Buddha had attained enlightenment and Buddhahood. Finally, another news entry is dedicated to the description of Buddha Bar protests in Indonesia by Buddhists as well as citizens against corruption. The decoration of the bar as a Buddhist temple was protested initially, and then when it was discovered that public money was spent for decoration and the owners were the ex-president and the daughters of the city governor, citizens against corruption also joined the protests by Buddhists (24.03.2009).

We are moving to positive ones: One of the articles was dedicated to the portrait of Dalai Lama and whether there would be another Dalai Lama after him or whether this title will cease to exist (17.12.2014). In another news, the Buddhist robot, Xian'er of Longquan Monastery, Beijing is described (27.04.2016). Another article narrates the story of an organ donor charity in the

United States, which was initiated by a concerned citizen who was converted from Christianity to Buddhism (20.02.2012). Another article states that Shaolin monks are good at inspiring successful CEOs (11.09.2011), which, we think, may be contradictory to the essence of Buddhism. Another article briefly explains the significance of udumbara (उदुम्बर) flower in Buddhism (25.03.2010a).

Also a number of health-related positive news about Buddhism can be noted: Buddhism is considered to be cures for arthritis (06.03.2014), depression and stress (12.12.2007). Buddhism is also associated with happiness (16.01.2010, 26.01.2009).

Conclusion

To conclude, Turkish traveler-writer's travelogues about Buddhism and Buddhist countries are completely positive, although mostly superficial. For most of them, their representations of Buddhism are based on experiential but shallow impressions. The typical question of "who knows better? The one who reads the most or the one who travels the most?" becomes relevant in that sense. Travelers should read extensively about their destinations, that way they would be able to pen deeper and more sensible travelogues. Regardless of whether we like it or not, Buddhist-majority countries just like any other society are class-based societies. They are both paradise (for parasitic classes and rich tourists) and hell (for people at the lower end of the social and economic hierarchy) (Gezgin, 2017h). For example, tolerance for recently recognized genders is laudable, while slavery conditions for Myanmarese illegal workers, and slave workers in seafood industries in Thailand stand out as obvious cases of the class reality (see Marschke & Vandergeest, 2016; Vandergeest, Tran & Marschke, 2017). However Turkish travelogues rarely notice this reality. In fact there is no escape from class-based societies. The travelers' positiveness can be attributed to one subjective and one objective factor: They may be under the influence of novelty effect: We usually have positive impressions about new things (countries, jobs, marriages etc.). However, it is also due to the positive qualities of Buddhism.

The chief editor's travelogue on Bhutan and his genuine, authentic Buddhism experience are outstanding and interesting. Obviously, this bolstered the positive image of Buddhism in Turkey. However, this was before Myanmar atrocities. The situation in Myanmar has been highly detrimental to the positive image of Buddhism. Thus international Buddhist communities should be more active about this issue.

It is seen that Turkish traveler-writers visited all Buddhist geographies in East and Southeast Asia, although some of the locations were more frequented, such as Bangkok. In fact, Bangkok appears to be the first destination to understand Buddhism for many Turks. Kathmandu is in a similar position, only after Bangkok. It is noteworthy that visits to Tibet for Buddhism purposes is not common.

Both travelers and columnists are positive about Buddhism. Buddhism is associated with wisdom, tranquility and peace by them. One can, however, note the government's response to yoga centers, which involve prohibition and repression.

It is observed that portrayals of celebrities as Buddhists or as interested in Buddhism reinforce the interest in Buddhism in Turkey, while Buddhism in foreign news can be related to negative contents such as scandals or positive contents such as health benefits of Buddhism and its relation with happiness.

To conclude, the overall tone of Turkish representations of Buddhism is highly positive, however Arakan conflict can quickly tarnish this. Thus, international Buddhist communities should be more active in condemning, reacting and practically ending Myanmar violence peacefully to maintain their positive international image.

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