Abstract

Religious tourism is part of a multi-billion-dollar tourism niche market. While tourism promoters and religious groups have embraced tourism for monetary gain, some scholars have expressed concerns about the crass commodification of religious sites and rituals; that religious symbols and icons have become kitsch with no real meaning. However, these concerns seem to be Eurocentric, in that these same concerns do not seem to be manifest from similar groups in South and East Asia, where religion and commerce have long been intertwined. To illustrate these cultural differences, this paper focuses on the Seven Gods of Good Fortune pilgrimage routes in Japan, which has long been associated with the proliferation of commercialism, individualism, and secularism. The paper discusses expansion of the Seven Gods to include a non-Japanese god of good fortune—Billiken. This newer God of Good Fortune is located in the Tsūtenkaku Tower in Osaka, and was added specifically to the Seven Gods pantheon because of its commercial potential rather than any theological or after-world benefit. This case study illustrates the need for researchers to not only be more cognizant of cultural differences in relation to religion and commodification, but also move beyond the sacred/secular dichotomy to explore examples of the hybridization of religion and commerce.