



Naturalising Empire: The Lumbini Festival and Pan-Asian Buddhist Brotherhood

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This paper considers how concepts of empire and of Japan's position as leader of Asia were naturalized in the mid 1920s through the transformation, mass public performance and celebration of Hanamatsuri, the Buddha's birthday, and through the *Young East*, a journal written in English—the shared heritage of colonial Asia for distribution throughout the Buddhist world. Hanamatsuri, previously observed at neighbourhood temples, became a 3 day long public spectacle that took over the city spaces of Tokyo. Radio broadcast specially written hymns and stories. A parade of thousands walked across the city from Asakusa to Hibiya park. Airplanes flew over and blessed the city with a rain of millions of lotus petals. Renamed the 'Lumbini Festival', it linked familiar Japanese practice with the Indian continent, the birthplace of the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni, and with the practices of Buddhists throughout Asia. The Lumbini festival was a performance of Japanese Buddhist modernity which expressed and naturalized Japan's position as leader of Buddhist Asia.