



## Can the Western Tourist Gaze be deconstructed through Buddhist Ontology?

Mahesh Hapugoda<sup>1</sup> and Iraj Ratnayake<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Languages, <sup>2</sup>Department of Tourism Management, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

Received 2 August 2020

Revised 1 January 2021

Accepted 08 January 2021

### Abstract

*This theoretical review argues that the western tourist gaze can be deconstructed through the Buddhist ontology of avidyā and prajñā. If Buddhism is about discovering the truth of 'self' (end of self and everyday ego) in which emptiness in life is enveloped in a fictional darkness of ignorance (avidyā), its ontology unfolds to overcome that emptiness and to bring in awareness about the illusion that covers the above truth (prajñā). When the ordinary consciousness is based on the sensory perception of subject-object dichotomy, the foundation of the western way of looking at a phenomenon becomes incomplete, since such experience, according to Buddhist ontology, belongs to a cosmic illusion that disturbs prajñā (true wisdom). 'The knowing of not-knowing' (prajñā) and understanding the emptiness of ego are the true Buddhist home grounds of 'being' rather than 'becoming'. In this context, with the philosophical insights advanced by the Kyoto School of Thoughts, this paper articulates that the western gaze in the discovery of the outer world can become meaningless. Hence, the western tourist gaze that seeks pleasure or leisure or even newness would be futile as it leads to avidya, the manifestation of the ego. The conclusion is that 'the union of the seer and the seen' gets deconstructed when the individual deeply realizes the fundamental nothingness that creates the above subjective-objective illusion (avidyā) - the foundation of the western tourist gaze. Reaching the Buddhist metaphysical assumption of sūnyatā (zero or permanent void), where the ego is dissolved is only possible when one realizes that nothingness is the thread that ties both subject (tourist) and object (site) together.*

**Keywords:** Nothingness, Kyoto School of Thoughts, Buddhist Ontology, Ego, Tourist Gaze

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: [hapugoda@gmail.com](mailto:hapugoda@gmail.com)  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3943-3180>

## **INTRODUCTION**

Man is driven by the desire to explore nature by uncovering the mysteries of her geography (Boosting 1992). This desire can be seen in all civilizations in the world, be it Western, Mediterranean, Far Eastern or Hindu. According to Boosting (1992), man has an incurable optimism and an insatiable curiosity to see the unfamiliar. This drive to travel helped man in the fifteenth century to voyage beyond Europe to Asia and Africa and to discover the Americas. To discover the unknown by chance is now linked with the empty term 'adventure' (78), which is sold cheaply in American restaurants and experiencing newness is a pseudo-event of exaggerated symbolization. In this context, the whole human experience is uprooted from its modern Enlightenment motives and replanted in a fully commercialized hyper-setting. People travel outside their inhabitations in millions due to tourism, yet their experience of travelling to a distant place and experiencing it has not made them different. According to Boosting (1992), this un-changed postmodern man is borne out of the said fabricated experiences generated by tourism. The attitude of tourism is often shaped by the exaggerated expectation of encountering the unexpected, unfamiliar, or never-heard-of experience by the explorer. It is an optimistic drive towards an unknown, triggered by insatiable curiosity. This is how the discovery of an exotic scene became something that erased the boredom of the familiar, and this imagination was there in both the rich and poor. The industrial man, who is alienated in the urban streets in mega cities dreamt more of such exotic, far-away places in the globe and sought them in the name of explorations. Tourism in the twentieth century became a major industry for those alienated souls and European tourists seek out the exotic beauty that was once lost in their industrial settings. They wanted to see 'things' which were originally repressed in their urban settings due to the increasing modernization that they experienced. Therefore, tourism always has a touch of nostalgia of some lost beauty, harmony, and simplicity of a previous era.

The gaze of a tourist, especially from the perspective of a European tourist, who visits a non-European setting, always aimed an imagined fantasy of lost beauty. To cater to this demand, the commercial value of this nostalgic gaze, there was 'staged-authenticity' (2011) from the site. The site-arrangement became more real than real, since it had to please the eye of a nostalgic observer. Hence, even though the non-European settings were actually facing modernization as part of their societal progress, those communities happened to pretend that they still follow some ancient way of life. This pretention was

not something organically true for those pretenders who camouflaged themselves as followers of some by-gone way of life. They also became actors of some fantasy-fiction of primitivism that was staged for the commercial value that nostalgic Europeans gave them. However, ‘the pseudo-experience’ (Boosting 1992) of the tourist is guaranteed not only because of the Capitalist commodification of the so-called authentic experience but also because of the fantasy investment towards some static, fixed and unchanging reality that those tourist wants to see in those geographies.

However, the truth is something different. Every society changes due to various reasons, and the Buddhist way of understanding this is that one should be psychologically ready to acknowledge such changes. The European gaze of authenticity is hence challenged by the Buddhist view that there is no inherent essence to anything and everything is caught in a flux of different meanings and perspectives. To grasp something as real can be an illusion, since in the next moment that reality seen will change into something else. The desire to see something as real, hence will definitely give you a sense of sadness, disappointment, and angst. ‘The pilgrimage of modern man’ (Cohen 1979) to see some frozen, fantasized unchanged reality would be a quest for anxiety (Redfoot 1984) if the seer does not know how to digest the deconstruction of speedy changes in the non-European life-world. Hence, the role of the critiques of tourism literature would be to point out that such quest for authenticity would itself be impossible by definition. Gaze would be important, according to Buddhism, if it aims at non-identification, non-ego, absolute nothingness and Anichcha in order to realize ultimate emancipation. The main objective of this paper is to use Buddhist deconstruction to bring in a different perspective about the western tourist gaze, which structures desire of the other and then to contextualize the tourist gaze that objectifies what the tourist wants to see and how the site should be arranged to please the eye. In order to accomplish this contextualization, the western gaze and the Buddhist way of understanding the outer world will be theoretically compared.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Based on the literary gap that there are no studies conducted on tourist gaze in non-western spheres (Samarathunga & Cheng, 2020), this paper structured as a theoretical review to investigate the two ontological paradigms between tourist gaze and the Buddhist view of avidyā. This review then attempts to make a theoretical deconstruction of the idea of existing tourist gaze

in order to redefine it. It uses the Kyoto School Thoughts and their conceptualization of Buddhist ontology to deconstruct the dominant western idea of tourist gaze. The paper employs the basic deconstructionist language tools and critical hermeneutic theories to compare and contrast the two paradigms of theoretical approaches in understanding and dealing with reality. The ideas of Patichcha Samuppada (dependent co-arising), Anichcha (impermanence), Upādāna (over-identification) and Pragnā (ignorance) in Theravada Buddhism will also be helpful in this analysis. Rather than nihilistically denying the western tourist gaze, this analysis aims to suggest that the true authenticity a tourist can gain in his or her experience is to go deeper into the spiritual experience in the site than simply indulging in its visual integrity. Theoretically, with a Buddhist insight, this paper conceptualizes that the consciousness offered to an observer by a particular experience can be deemed the most important aspect of a tourist experience, rather than ritualistic sightseeing and absorption of the site's authentic experience. This by no means rejects the western ontological approach of exploring the outer world for fresh experience and newness, but tries to harmonize the two different, yet significant ontological approaches for a sustainable spiritual tourism and better world.

## **DISCUSSION**

**Gaze and Unfreedom:** The gaze of those who want to see something determines the nature of the objective reality that is intended to be seen. Such reality is often organized in accordance to the desire of the viewer who wants to see some reality in a certain way. Their desire is often generated through curiosity for the unseen. Some critics point out that the motivation to travel is triggered not only through curiosity, but also through the need to escape from the modern setting, which is often understood as an existential escape from alienation. This is called the 'temporary distraction from an already alienated home existence' (Lew and Wong 2005). The nostalgic desire to see the imagined non-alienated, pre-modern 'existential-escapes' in non-European spaces as exotic sightseeing and retreating landscapes is precisely what is addressed in commercial tourism marketing spheres. Within an Asian context, Kerala tourism in India, Bali in Indonesia or even Banana Reef in Maldives can be identified as destinations that target the gaze of the nostalgic tourist. The coconut gloves, thatched roofs, clay walls, mud huts and traditional agrarian household equipment and food items become fetish attractions of the metropolitan tourist. Yet, those who truly live there as locals dream to acquire the metropolitan's modern living conditions. Accordingly, the people who build

the atmosphere for the gaze of the metropolitan tourist are not free because they are caught in the desire of the seer, and the seer in turn is caught in the sight of the artificial portrayal of an exotic atmosphere. So, it is a dialectical two-way process of reciprocal un-freedom.

In the context of sightseeing tourism, maintenance of originality or authenticity of a site also depends on the gaze of the viewer (MacCannell 2011; Urry 2011). The tourist gaze structures a particular reality in an alien land whose organization of reality intends to cater to the anxious and curious mind of the tourist who visits them from the west, desiring to see an original atmosphere. However, this dialectic mentality of wanting to see and organizing reality in accordance with someone's desire is always a subjective phenomenon. Entrapment in the gaze of another itself can create a sense of ingenuity since the re-production of reality is unconsciously determined by the other's desire. In this regard, deconstructing the western gaze, which seeks exoticism, originality or even authenticity in an imagined alien land is a phenomenon that should be considered as a postmodern condition, in which rather than modernizing the life-world of the non-European space, the tourist gaze aims to regenerate an alternative modernity by offering an excessive fetish value for the pre-modern world. Hence, the European tourists seem to carry a fantasy of an unchanged or authentic non-European space, while the truly changing life of non-Europeans dream to revisit the European geography by migrating to Europe to materialize their Eurocentric fantasy. In this paradoxical endeavour, the tropical resorts become more expensive and over-crowded at times than the best villas in the European metropolis.

To be free from the gaze of the other, the Buddhist way advocates the elimination of desire. The 'liberating insight' is based on the perspective that there is a co-relationship between desire and disappointment. The awareness or the prajñā Buddhism denotes that desire co-arises from the false conceptualization that satisfaction of a desire may provide happiness. The disappointment is caused out of the ignorance of the four noble truths of Buddhism; the truth of suffering (*dukkha*), the truth of the origin of suffering (*samudāya*), the truth of the secession of suffering (*nirodha*) and the truth of the path to the secession of suffering (*mārga*). Every satisfaction is temporary and the motion of the wheel of truth is that when one reaches the status of prajñā or deeper awareness that craving for desire causes suffering and the only way to eliminate suffering is to end the sensual pleasure, one may also reach the ultimate state of Buddha hood. The complete secession of craving and

annihilation of attachment that detach one's clinging to worldly sensual pleasures, will open up the right path to live, right path to thought, right livelihood, right speech, etc. The highest awareness is that re-becoming (re-birth) is only possible because of the illusion or misunderstanding (ignorance), in which man sees things without the truth about them. Though there is no inner essence to anything that one sees, the truth that pertains everything is that everything is impermanent and subject to change. The experience of something becomes complete when the person who experiences the reality realizes that there is an illusion behind that reality. One cannot afford to be negligent about that illusion.

Unity in Opposites and Absolute Nothingness: The truth that every reality is impermanent, everything is subject to decay and dies, and that impermanence in things will eventually make humans unhappy are fundamental ontological realizations in Buddhism. Hence, the Kyoto School of Thoughts believes that a human experiences absolute nothingness when there is a unity of opposites (Kitaro, 1958). The meaning that one derives from the tension that grows from within the seer (tourist) and the seen (site) can disappear into nothingness when the epistemological difference between demand for perfection and deductive assumption towards authentic presentation find a middle way. Consciousness is that neither the presentation of perfection (beauty) nor psychological expectation of perfect gaze (fantasy) exists in the real world. This does not mean that the objectivity and subjectivity of this phenomenon are rejected or deemed unimportant. Rather, it is possible to point out that such polarized, spatial and temporal conditions keep on changing and the observer and the observed to evolve in an ever changing historical timeline. The presentation of beauty of perfection is quite important, as far as it shows that even the most perfect arrangement is subject to change and decay. For example, the Japanese garden culture is presented with absolute neatness and perfect arrangements yet symbolizes slow change in perfection and impermanence in material things. The observer is expected to change perspective and see what is beyond the presentation.

This means the observer is provided a room for his or her own contemplations other than the fact that every symbolic meaning is given to the observer as a ready-made package. Every individual is expected to find his or her own meaning in life and therefore the touristic site should be kept as an open space of abstract imaginations and deconstructions of such imaginations. It is necessary to erase certain things in a drawing to pave the way to paint new

things. For this endeavor, the observer must construct meaning in what he or she sees, and then must deconstruct them in order to build something new. Then what is built new in one's contemplations will be further erased to give space another new thought. When the observer is fully engaged in this process of evolving with slow time and discovering meaning, the dialectical tension between seer and seen gets dissolved and some harmony takes place between that dialectic, by way of identification and de-identification. The metaphor of Lord Buddha is eminent here, where He stayed for several days before the Bodhi tree in reverence and acknowledgment of gratitude for sheltering Him in the attainment of Buddhahood, but then he left the Bodhi tree to help the world. In this act, the process of identification and de-identification becomes obvious, when the transcending and the transcendent become a unity. Buddha acknowledges the uniqueness of nature not as an oppositional or dialectical force, but as oneness in which even the highest attainment is possible.

Elimination of the Ego: The architecture of travelling is based on experiencing diversity and changing the usual place of stay. Leisure brings in an essential break for an alienated metropolitan citizen and pleasure also entails something important in its deepest existential sense. However, the architecture of tourism that defines and promotes human movement from the usual place of stay to another place aiming leisure, relaxation or pleasure essentially objectifies to enrich and refresh the human ego. Be it psychological or physical, the seeking out for perfection and beauty is often structured to maximize the same. But according to Buddhist ontology, no journey is worthwhile if such an act does not help mankind to enhance awareness of the self and bring in a profound psychological equilibrium between self and change. One major reason for anxiety and psychological imbalance is man's inability to understand changes in the material world. This imbalance results in human suffering. The maturity of mind is that one makes space for whatever happens, accepts changes and lives in a moment-to-moment manner. Hence, a Buddhist cannot expect or imagine a fixed reality, since the material world is caught in a cobweb of dynamic changes in its evolutionary process. The consciousness of constant change transcends a mirror for the ego to adapt to the unavoidable changes in the outer world and offers a freedom for the subject not to identify with it.

For a Buddhist, over-identification is the main obstacle against reaching emancipation, and it has to be deconstructed (Lotus Sutra). Human ego always entices man to cling to something, reach out for it and possess it. Possession always gives temporal pleasure for the ego, and it seeks more and more

possessions assuming it gives more happiness. Yet, the underlying reality of possession is everything is subject to change, evolutions and dispossession. However, for both Buddhism and psychoanalysis, ego is not entirely a bad thing to realistically live in the material world. Yet, ego without reflection causes suffering. Mindfulness can bring in some equilibrium to this paradox. One should live a life of deeper awareness, which reflects the true nature of our existence and the existence of the world. Such mirroring awareness is important since it is capable of deconstructing the self-centeredness of the human ego and then encouraging self-reflection over the illusory materialism that may trigger eventual over-identifications. To develop a healthy ego, one should maintain some amount of psychological distancing with objective reality, as well as with sensual drives.

**Intelligibility and False Consciousness:** One fundamental way for a Buddhist to experience the world is to engage in self-reflective mode with utmost consciousness of the 'here and now'. Epistemologically, the ego-consciousness that comes with speculative reality and logical reasoning is again an obstacle to overcome the ego, since the sphere of 'knowledge' or 'knowing' may distract the truth about reality. If reality is taken as a fixed phenomenon that brings in knowledge, according to Buddhism, it can lead to an illusion. Intelligibility of the phenomenon transcends while the so-called reality is does the same. Other than the outer world, according to Kitaro (1958), there is an inner world too that aims to develop consciousness through transcending. Though these two worlds are connected, the latter is deeper than the former. Hence, rather than simply observing nature, Buddhism may rather advocate the seer to perceive nature in a transcendental manner, in which the dialectic of seer and seen get dissolved into a harmonious union beyond judgment (1958: 32). This union is placed beyond the intelligibility of an ordinary observer. One becomes subjective and objective at the same time, since objectivity reflects the subjective nature of one's existence and vice versa. To experience this oneness, the observer has to be part of nature as a whole. If a tourist is attracted to nature beyond its speculative aesthetic sensibility, it is so, according to Zen teachings, that the self gets dissolved in nature. Rather than leading to a false consideration that 'I visited mount Everest' or 'I climbed mount Kyoto' where 'I' gets further enlarged, what should happen to individuality or ego is that the vastness of nature must make one feel that one is just a small being in the entire cosmos.



In other words, one should feel that ‘I exist as part of the infinite cosmos rather than need to conquer it’. Rather than desiring newness (Upādāna), it should be understood that the so-called newness is an illusion that triggers another form of desire. Hence, desire continues as a part of intelligibility (‘desire to know’ itself is an illusion or, in other words, false consciousness that leads to avidhya). Nothingness dissolves all the other standpoints including the ‘self-deconstruction of the self’ (Nishitani 1990). Nature or beauty is therefore transcendental reality, into which Ego dissolves. ‘Self-awareness of absolute nothingness’ (Kitaro 1982) is the de-ontological entity (reversing of western empiricism’s sensory experience) that Buddhism offers to the touristic viewer, who seeks pleasure.

Similarly, the very experience of physical movement (travelling, exploring or being away from home) for pleasure or seeking an authenticity in the experience can be deemed as a fundamentally meaningless venture, because the architecture of seeking out for something entails a fulfilment of desire. Such construction of desire (of something) never leads to enlightenment. The seeking out for authenticity may result in suffering or frustration, because in Buddhism, there is no personal or impersonal Absolute (Loy 1992). Sensation will lead to craving for that sensation, and craving will cause attachment. Grasping leads to becoming, and becoming is to die for another re-birth (1992, 231). ‘Such clinging is traditionally classified into four types: clinging to pleasure, to views, to morality and external observances, and to belief in a soul or self’ (231). To assume that there is a reality or existence without the infections of the traces of something else (dependent co-origination or pratitya-samutpada) is an illusion. ‘No things whatsoever exist, at any time or place, having risen by themselves, from another, from both or without cause’ (231). Hence, the sensation that leads to observe something or someone depends on other casual relation, while what is observed also depends on other entities. Both gaze and the gazed are conditioned by known and unknown entities. Therefore, both gaze and the gazed do not represent anything independent or self-representational. Hence, the concept of nothingness can deconstruct both gaze and the gazed, because they do not self-exist or self-represent.

This is why the Kyoto School of Thoughts believes that there is a fundamental nothingness with which every experience is built. Moving away from a familiar habitat to escape from the experience of boredom (motivation for travelling), from a Buddhist point of view, with the curiosity to explore more (or even to know more) can be identified as an illusion, since any new

experience adds more to the construction of desire, intelligibility and finally to the advancement of the Ego. The modern psychoanalytical gaze that structures human desire as well as the touristic gaze that objectifies pleasure would therefore be meaningless, since every experience is under constant erasure and concepts constructed based on such experience under erasure can be deconstructed. When we see something, there are countless things that are unseen about it. But if you are very careful, then you can see the unseen. According to Thich Nhat Hanh,

If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow, and without trees we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either (Ellsberg, 2001).

The Ontological Difference: The western world view is structured through the fundamental ontological position of discovering the outer world through sensory observations. Modern empiricism, the foundation of modern science, believes in direct or indirect observation of reality. Hence, gaze becomes a key concept in understanding and identifying with the objective world believed to exist outside the subject. Meanwhile, the gaze helps an individual to gain pleasure through scenic beauty and the outer reality should be organized, in a touristic sense, to cater the said gaze. Yet, Buddhism claims that there is no fixed outer reality other than our own mental constructions that finally lead to illusions and distractions of reaching *abignā*, which is the knowledge of *anichcha* (Kalupahana 1976; Rahula 2002; Molloy 2005). It is a knowledge that surpasses ordinary sensory experience and establishes the truth that 'there is only infinite emptiness'. In this context, the vision, the basic pillar of sensory perception, helps gaining no new knowledge other than another illusion, *upadana*. Hence, the common western conceptualization of tourist gaze that seeks authenticity (MacCannel 2011; Urry 2011; Ratnayake & Hapugoda 2014) becomes problematic, because no physical gaze will help humans to gain true awareness, according to Buddhist ontology. Further, it will also aggravate and enhance one's fictional darkness or ignorance. If Buddhism is about discovering the truth of 'self' (end of self and everyday ego) that emptiness in our life, enveloped in a fictional darkness of ignorance (*avidyā*), its ontology is structured to traverse the emptiness and meaninglessness that cover the above truth. The ordinary consciousness that one gains through phenomenological experience, based on the subject-object dichotomy or the reality and realization,

the foundation of western way of looking at the objective world, becomes problematic since such experience, according to Buddhist ontology, belongs to a cosmic illusion that disturbs *prajna* (true wisdom). ‘The knowing of not-knowing’ (*prajñā*) and understanding the emptiness of ego are true Buddhist home-ground of ‘being’, rather than the western way of ‘becoming’.

Buddhist ontology seeks its believers to undergo a stage of *samadhi*, a self-joyous attainment of non-attachment, where self is no longer attached to itself. Hence, the Buddhist way of looking at the phenomenological world is, according to Nishitani (2001), ‘those who lively walk in the Tokyo fashion houses right now, whether young or old, will be skeletons in hundred years from now on’. For Nishitani, the ‘true suchness’ is that there is constant and unavoidable synchronicity in life-in-death and death-in-life (Heisig2001). While the western eye seeks out the objective world for the discovery of truth, for an enlightened Buddhist eye, both life and end of life (*samsāra*) is simultaneously visible in a flux. Hence, instead of caring for the daily reality of *samsāra*, Buddhist ontology seriously considers the transcendental relationship between *samsāra* (circle of life) and *nirvana* (the end of the circle). Since absolute self-emptying (non-ego) and consciousness of self-awakening to the original face of the self and world (Nishitani 2001: 222) are the foundations of Buddhism, it does not encourage the ordinary human motive of seeking out more in the objective world.

In this context, with the philosophical insights advanced by the Kyoto School of Thoughts (especially paying attention to the philosophies by Nishida Kitaro, Tanabe Hajime and Nishitani Keiji) in the first half of the twentieth century, it can be argued that the western mode of discovery of the outer world becomes meaningless in the eyes of Buddhist ontology. Based on this paradigm, it is possible to suggest that the western tourist gaze that seeks pleasure or leisure or even newness is nothing but a futile effort of establishing illusion (*avidya*), which adds more to the manifestation of the ego. The consciousness that one gains through sensory perception is not enough to reach true liberation, and such consciousness is just an extension of the same ego-centred existence that leads to endless suffering. If the middle-class tourist desires to seek pleasure (MacCannell 2013) through the objective world and its authenticity, he or she ends up in the same old circle of darkness or in ignorance or suffering.

It is through the Mahayana Buddhist tradition that the Kyoto School of Thoughts developed its famous theory of nothingness. By being Buddhists and Easterners they aimed to develop a philosophy that is by no means Eastern or Buddhist (Heisig2001: 8). With their struggle to change the outlook of Eastern philosophy, at least the Buddhist philosophy in Japan, they could produce a new form of Buddhist existential philosophy that could, for the first time, be understood by a western mind. Until then, Eastern philosophy was considered incomprehensible for a modern Western mind that abstractly seeks out for dialectical, rational and empirical worldview. The enlightenment inheritance of the Western mind is shaped within the contours of scientific and technological advancements and is within the drive of individualism and freedom. However, Buddhism is influenced by the early Indian idea of nothingness (or sunyata), which means that there is no absolute 'essence' in any worldly thing that we experience. The lack of final 'substance' or insubstantiality offers the meanings that there is no meaning in our existence. It may be that an observer detects difference when he or she moves from one phenomenon to another, but other than that, there is nothing for us to permanently embrace. It is this difference that people seek as 'beauty' in unseen locations but the theory of impermanence in Buddhism has an overarching impact on the objective world that we beautify to please the eye. When the objective world changes every moment of our existence, when the experience of the previous moment gets dissolved in the next moment, there is a deconstructive effect in the time factor in the real world.

This deconstructive nature in Buddhism is further developed by Magliola (1984) in his famous text 'Derrida on the Mend'. Every moment is negated by the next moment and the next moment will be something entirely different from the following moment and this goes on and on in such manner until a human understands that the continuation that he or she sees in those moments as continuation of life is an illusion. Hence, one can see the same reality twice or experience the same phenomenon twice. The momentary satisfaction that one earns by seeing the causative interconnection in these moments comes from avidhya or negligence. Hence, the touristic phenomenon of seeing something can be an illusion not only because the phenomenon changes constantly but because even the seer changes. Hence, the most effective way to look at something, according to Buddhism, is to use dependent co-arising in order to not grasp the snake from the wrong end. It is necessary to look at reality as a deconstructing phenomenon in which the binary opposition between the seer and the seen in a particular moment is determined through

meanings of countless other signifiers, which existed prior to the encounter of both seer and seen. The touristic anxiety for a pure existence, fixed reality or unchanging authenticity has to be deconstructed and the gaze should notice the underlying flux of cosmic change in every phenomenon.

## **CONCLUSION**

Tourist gaze is an important concept in tourism literature, and it can be used to determine certain universal values in a touristic landscape. But the snake has been grasped from the wrong end. Within the context of superficial mass tourism and with its adverse consequence on communities, tourist gaze has to now be viewed using different lenses to understand the real motivation behind it. On the Buddhist understanding that sensory experience is a strictly limited entity in the understanding of reality, this paper concludes that the experience of a tourist can be enhanced by exposing himself to the true ontological way in which Buddhists interpret and understand the world. Hence, the travel for leisure or promoting tourists for leisure, according to a Buddhist point of view, would be an incomplete experience, if the tourist cannot transcend the experience into deep self-reflection. In addition, he or she should be able to understand that the phenomenon that is presented to him or her is a changing and dependent entity. There is an observable aspect as well as reflective element that need to be understood with the concept of nothingness (*sunyata*). When the touristic gaze is viewed with the Buddhist ontology, the tourist gaze can be contextualized to mean that the reality that one sees as real or beautiful or pleasurable will be either an illusion or a distraction. Further, it is always advisable that a visitor should go beyond the sensory experience to reach at a higher awareness of meaninglessness in existence. This means that the site visitation based on visual integrity is insufficient to inculcate such a higher value or even to understand the true meaning of Buddhism. The tourist must actually reach the stage of ‘knowing of not knowing’ or *prajna* (true wisdom) and understanding the emptiness of the ego-building process that is enhanced through the gaze or just visualization of the reality for pleasure or leisure.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their excellent reviewer suggestions in completing this study.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**REFERENCES**

- Boosting, D.J. (1992) *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. New York: Vintage.
- Cohen, E. A. (1979) Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences. *Sociology*. 13(2): 179-201.
- Ellsberg, R. (2001) *Thich Nhat Hanh: Essential Writings*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Heisig, J.W. (2001) *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School*. Honolulu: University of Hawai Press.
- Kalupahana, D. (1976) *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.
- Kitaro, N. (1958) *Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness: Three Philosophical Essays*. Honolulu: East West Center Press.
- Lew, A. A. & Wong, A. (2005) Existential Tourism and the Homeland: The Overseas Chinese Experience. In *The Seductions of Place: Geographical Perspectives on Globalization and Touristed Landscapes*. C.L. Carter and A.A. Lew (eds.), London: Routledge.
- Loy, D. R. (1992) *The Deconstruction of Buddhism*. In *Derrida and Negative Theology*. H. Coward and T. Foshay (eds). Albany, NY: Suny Press.
- MacCannell, D. (2011) *The Ethics of Sightseeing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- MacCannell, D. (2013) *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Magliola, R. (1984) *Derrida on the Mend*. Indiana: Purdue University Press.
- Molloy, M. (2005) *Experiencing the World's Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Nishitani, K. (1990) *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*. (Trans Graham Parkes & Setsuko Aihara). USA: State University of New York Press.
- Rahula, W. (2002) *What the Buddha Taught*. Oxford: One world Publication.

Ratnayake, I. & Hapugoda, M. (2014) Diverged Meaning of Heritage: A Critique on Visual Authenticity of the Golden Rock Temple of Dambulla. In *Sustainable Tourism in the Global South: Communities, Environments and Management*. Malcolm J. M. Cooper, Mohamed Aslam, Nor'ain Othman, and Alan A. Lew (eds.). UK: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

Redfoot, D. (1984) Tourist Authenticity: Tourist Angst and Modern Reality. *Qualitative Sociology*, 7(4): 291-309.

Samarathunga, W.H.M.S. & Cheng, L. (2020) Tourist Gaze and Beyond: State of the Art. *Tourism Review*. DOI: 10.1108/TR-06-2020-0248

Urry, J. (2011). *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage.