



Wild

Geese

Buddhism in Canada

Edited by

John S. Harding, Victor Sōgen Hori and Alexander Soucy

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Wild Geese

The wild geese do not intend to leave traces,

The water has no mind to receive their image.

– Zen verse



Introduction

At the Zen Centre of Vancouver, Zen teacher Eshin Godfrey rings a bell and a roomful of Western Zen students cross their legs and settle into meditation. The centre was founded in 1970 and Eshin, who trained at the Mount Baldy Zen Center in Los Angeles, is a full-time abbot guiding a full house of students. In Raymond, Alberta on 4 July 2004, hundreds of Japanese Canadians gathered to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Raymond Buddhist Church. Three generations of past and present members listened to each other's stories of trial and tribulation, faith and hope. At the Winnipeg Centre of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), members gather to chant *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*, the title of the *Lotus Sūtra*; after the chanting, one after another, they give testimony of how the daily practice of chanting transforms their lives. In Mississauga, on the western outskirts of Toronto, at the imposing Fo Guang Shan Buddhist temple, a nun in red and gold robes leads a congregation of hundreds of Chinese lay people in prostrations before the Buddha. The temple is one of a worldwide network of Fo Guang Shan temples, whose master in Taiwan, Hsing Yun, teaches a modernized "Humanistic Buddhism." North of Montreal at Monastère Tam Bảo Sơn in Harrington, Quebec, a Vietnamese monk guides visitors around the hall of one thousand buddhas. Arranged strategically around the several hundred acres of the monastery grounds are statues representing the major events in the life of the Buddha. At Gampo Abbey on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, monastics prepare their students for the Sopa Chöling retreat. The Sopa Chöling retreat lasts three years during which retreatants withdraw from society and spend each day from 5:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. in Buddhist practice. Canadians are practising Buddhism from sea to sea.

The story of Buddhism in Canada is told in two parts: before and after 1967. Before 1967, the scene of Buddhism in Canada is painted chiefly with the Japanese in the foreground. It was the Japanese who built the first Buddhist temple in Vancouver in 1905, and it was also the Japanese Jodo Shinshu Buddhists who built the first Buddhist churches in the provinces east of British Columbia, in Alberta at the end of the 1920s, Toronto in the 1940s, Manitoba in the 1950s, and Quebec in the 1960s. Their story is a tale of struggle against overt and systematic discrimination marked by such incidents as the Anti-Asiatic Riot of 1907 and the forced removal of the Japanese into relocation camps during the Second World War.¹

Two great social changes occurred in the 1960s. First, in 1967, Canada revised its immigration laws. The old laws were based on controlling the flow of undesirable races; perhaps the most dramatic examples of these laws were the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885 and the subsequent laws that imposed the Chinese head tax.² The new immigration laws after 1967 were race-neutral and based on points – points for the level of education, ability to speak one of the national languages, type of occupation, etc. Those with enough points, regardless of race, were allowed to immigrate. In the 1970s under the government of Pierre Elliot Trudeau, Canada adopted a policy of multiculturalism, officially welcoming people of all races and cultures. From the world's Buddhist countries – China, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Korea, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and others – the new immigrants brought their religion, Buddhism.

A second great social change began in the 1960s. In fact, the phrase “the sixties” is shorthand for a time when, all around the world, people demonstrated against the war in Vietnam, students held sit-ins against their university administrations, the Black Power and Women's Lib movements began, and many people rejected conventional religion and sought a new spirituality. During this era, people from all walks of life associated themselves with “the counter-culture” and experimented with new music, new ideas, new social relations, and new ways of life. D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts had been writing about Zen and Buddhism for decades but in this time of cultural ferment, their writings suddenly gained a new momentum and planted the seed of Buddhism among Westerners. The San Francisco Zen Center, the first Zen centre in the West, was opened in 1962 by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. Since then, Buddhism in many forms has grown exponentially among Westerners.

We now live in a Canada shaped by all this history. As the Buddhism in Canada website graphically shows, every form of Buddhism can be found in

every province in Canada.³ The 1971 policy of multiculturalism in Canada and the new social openness to alternative forms of spirituality have contributed to the increasing religious diversity, and hence to the surge of the Buddhist population. But one cannot escape history. In fact, it was the hostile attitude toward Japanese Canadians that first dispersed Buddhism across the continent when the Canadian government forced the Japanese to move from the west coast and relocate inland during World War II. Until 1965, the only Buddhist group in Toronto was the Japanese Toronto Buddhist Church, and as late as 1970, only two Buddhist groups were to be found in Montreal, one based in Japanese tradition and the other Chinese. Chinese immigrants represent the other force that brought Buddhism from British Columbia to eastern parts of Canada. The early Chinese immigrants, who came in the late 1880s, were chiefly miners and railway workers responsible for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia. However, after completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Canadian government banned the immigration of Chinese to Canada. To escape the hostility they found in British Columbia, Chinese settlers began moving eastward and some brought their Buddhist faith with them. While Buddhism came from the East to the West, its transmission on Canadian soil actually went gradually from the west coast to the east driven by racial hostility. History is not without a sense of irony.

Today, while still relatively small, the number of Buddhists in Canada is steadily and rapidly increasing. Just as important as numerical growth among both immigrants and Westerners, Buddhism is quickly gaining acceptance in mainstream culture. The benevolent, smiling face of the Dalai Lama frequently appears in newscasts. Movie stars and rock musicians are known to be Buddhist. And everyone has a friend or relative who practises Buddhist meditation. High schools teach about Buddhism; many Canadian universities offer courses in Buddhism and a few have full-fledged doctoral programs in Buddhist studies. Scholars in the United States were the first to start studying the phenomenon of "Buddhism in America." An increasing number of Canadian scholars are now beginning to focus their research on Buddhism in Canada.

In 2006, at the annual conference for the Canadian Asian Studies Association (CASA), John Harding and Alec Soucy organized two sessions which dealt with the subject of Buddhism in Canada, with the specific intention of increasing scholarly interest in this nascent area of study and gathering together some of the people who have been thinking about particular problems, cases, and questions, as well as the overall shape of Buddhism in Canada. Among the

presenters at the conference was Victor Hori, who had also long been interested in studying Buddhism in Canada and who had for years been informally collecting the names of scholars in Canada doing such research. Following the meeting, the contributors discussed the possibility of the book and Victor joined John and Alec as editors of the project and brought in additional authors beyond the original eight presenters in Montreal. Because of the scarcity of research on Buddhism in Canada, everyone recognized that the book was sorely needed.

The first book to be published on Buddhism in Canada was Janet McLellan's *Many Petals of the Lotus: Five Asian Buddhist Communities in Toronto* (1999). McLellan gave us five highly detailed ethnographic portraits of the Japanese Canadian, Tibetan, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Chinese Buddhist communities of the city of Toronto, based on several years of participant-observer fieldwork. This excellent beginning to the study of Buddhism in Canada was not meant to cover the entire field, and so, many aspects of the study of Buddhism in Canada went untouched: Buddhism in other parts of Canada, the more than a century of history of Buddhism in Canada, the spread of Buddhism among Westerners, and the many other forms of ethnic Buddhism. Nor did it attempt to set out a technical vocabulary for analysing Buddhism or theoretical constructs for thinking about or explaining Buddhism in Canada.

The second book to be published on Buddhism in Canada was *Buddhism in Canada*, edited by Bruce Matthews (2006). Its ten essays were organized geographically and generally followed a common format. They gave some estimate of the number of Buddhists in each region, using Statistics Canada data. They then described the temples and centres in their region, usually under two categories, "Asian/ethnic" and "Western/convert" (or some similar vocabulary). Several essays further subdivided these two categories with a three-category division into Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, or with a breakdown into ethnic groups. The volume is descriptive in nature and provides an account of the status of Buddhist groups in Canada circa 2004–2005, in some cases with short histories. This book made an important contribution to our understanding of Buddhism in Canada by providing a survey of the state of Buddhism across the entire country. The essays came to no common conclusion, except to affirm that the number of Buddhist temples and meditation centres, and the size of their memberships, have grown dramatically in the last thirty to forty years. Where McLellan's book was a highly focused in-depth study of Asian immigrant communities in a single city, the Matthews book

swept across the entire country, giving a wide-angle snapshot of the number and variety of Buddhist groups. Inevitably it too could not devote much concentrated attention to other aspects of the study of Buddhism in Canada.

With these two contributions in mind, the editors of the present book saw clearly that the job was to bring order to an unorganized field, to address not one but a variety of interrelated issues. We felt that the way forward would be to look more closely at the particular traditions while using such particular case studies to explore general themes, such as global interconnections, the attraction of converts to Buddhism, and the debate concerning how to describe Buddhists and Buddhism(s) in the West. In conjunction with statistical analyses, historical surveys, and biographical life stories, these studies will foster reflection on, and critical engagement with, theoretical issues that might offer guidance to this still nascent field of Buddhism in Canada.

Victor Hori's essay in chapter 1 begins by challenging the "Two Buddhisms" categories used to classify the various kinds of Buddhism now found in the West. These categories have often drawn a distinction between immigrant Buddhists from Asia who have largely sought to maintain traditional practices, and Westerners who have converted to Buddhism and have been selective about which aspects they want to maintain. Hori suggests that not only are these categories too imprecise, but they also disguise value judgments, latent in such terms as "ethnic," which base types of Buddhism on a racial divide. Soucy too challenges the notion of this divide by pointing out that many of the major transformations that have been associated with Western forms of Buddhism were developed in Asia by Asian reformers. Soucy also goes on to examine the question of whether there is a "Canadian Buddhism." The "Two Buddhisms" categories have been found to be unsatisfactory by a number of authors in this book.

In his chapter, Terry Watada shows that most of the history of Buddhism in Canada has been the history of Buddhism practised by the Japanese community in Canada since 1905 – Jodo Shinshu (Pure Land) Buddhism – rather than by the Zen and Tibetan Buddhist traditions, which have attracted the most popular attention in the West, or by the larger recent waves of Buddhist immigrants from Asia. This century of history, long invisible, needs to be presented. The more recent developments in Buddhism in Canada all build upon this history. Henry Shiu gives a broad survey of the many forms of Buddhism that have appeared in Canada since the 1970s. In addition to cataloguing the different Buddhist traditions and main immigrant groups, he also tracks the

growth of academic Buddhist studies in Canadian universities. Peter Beyer provides a clear and detailed statistical analysis of the different Buddhist groups in Canada and also explains why StatsCan statistics cannot provide a precise estimate of the number of Western Buddhists in Canada.

All our authors attempt to show that the growth of Buddhism in Canada involves two processes: the transformation of Buddhist traditions to adapt to local conditions in Canada, and the transformation of local groups to adapt to Buddhist tradition. Globalization and localization are not opposing processes. Every adaptation is both an example of the global becoming local, and the local going global. Supplementing Watada's history, John Harding's study of the Pure Land Buddhist community in Raymond, Alberta tracks how the community was shaped by both global political currents and local community interests; it is particularly valuable because it provides us with the only long-term study of how a Buddhist community changes and evolves through three and four generations. The study by Marybeth White of the Lao Buddhist community explores how the community used ritual and symbol to recreate a sense of Lao Buddhist sacred space on Canadian land. The study by Patricia Campbell focuses on practitioners in a Toronto Zen Buddhist temple, asking what motivated them to approach Buddhism and how they understood the Buddhism they encountered. By contrast, the studies by Lina Verchery and Lynn Eldershaw focus more on the Buddhist organization, the Chinese Fo Guang Shan and the Tibetan Shambhala International respectively. These organizations skilfully adapt themselves to meet the special needs their practitioners may have or to meet the crises which history may throw their way.

Tannie Liu's study of Chinese Buddhism in Canada shows how the founding of local temples in Canada is linked to larger historical movements, such as the Buddhist modernization movement in early twentieth-century China. André Laliberté and Manuel Litalien's study links the Tzu Chi Buddhist Compassion and Relief Foundation in Canada to the rise of Tzu Chi in Taiwan and its spread around the globe. While setting out a history of Tibetan Buddhism in Canada, Sarah Haynes also attempts to answer the difficult question of why Westerners are so attracted to Tibetan Buddhism and how that attraction came about.

All these chapters make a similar point. Studies of Buddhism in the West until now have automatically assumed that modernization meant adapting Buddhism to Western culture; very few studies recognize that local Buddhist

groups are parts of global networks and that many of these global networks long ago began the process of modernization in Asia. Buddhism is not some entity fixed within a fossilized tradition. Everywhere in Asia, Buddhism has been dynamically evolving and modernizing. Local developments in Canada naturally reflect and contribute to that global development.

Buddhism is a lived religion. To convey what it means to live a life in Buddhism, we include the biographies of two people whose lives have been devoted to the practice and teaching of Buddhism. The first is Mauro Peressini's biography of Zen Master Albert Low. Now in his eightieth year, Low granted a series of extensive interviews to Peressini, recalling the long path that he has walked in Zen. The second is Victor Hori and Janet McLellan's biography of Suwanda Sugunasiri, originally from Sri Lanka, who has spent decades tirelessly speaking for Buddhism in the media, on government committees, and in interreligious dialogue, and forging Canadian Buddhist alliances and institutions.

The list of authors in this volume includes a wide spectrum of scholars, from the well-established to the new generation, but the centre of gravity lies with younger scholars. Research in the study of Buddhism traditionally meant that the scholar studied an ancient text written in a classical language. Only recently has this paradigm started to break down. Now, new scholars are emerging whose interests, and sometimes training, encourages them to study not classical Buddhism in its Asian context but the many forms of Buddhism today in their local Asian and Western contexts. It is fitting that the new generation of scholars play an important role in shaping this new field.

For a number of reasons there are several traditions that are important in Canada, but do not appear in this book. Most notable of these is the Vipassana organization, which is a secular meditation movement based on the Burmese Theravada Buddhist tradition. There are also important Buddhist communities which are underrepresented in this book. The Vietnamese Buddhist community, for example, is very prominent in the Canadian Buddhist scene today, but is mentioned only briefly in Shiu's essay and somewhat more extensively in Soucy's discussion of Thich Nhat Hanh's community in its local and global dimensions. However, while Thich Nhat Hanh is certainly mentioned, neither he nor his groups in Canada represent the traditional form of Buddhism that engages most Vietnamese Buddhists, in Canada, Vietnam, or elsewhere. While some may take exception to these and other omissions, the reasons for them were practical; we could not locate a capable author to deal with the subject, and

a single book cannot possibly cover everything. The editors do not pretend to have told the entire story of Buddhism in Canada; our task is to maintain the momentum created by McLellan and Matthews. We look forward to future studies by other scholars who will target the areas we have missed.

NOTES

- 1 The relocation in Canada, unlike the wartime policy of the United States toward the Japanese, in the beginning forced the male evacuees either into road camps, internment in compounds that resembled prisoner-of-war camps, or sugar beet projects across Canada; the women and children were resettled in the inland towns of British Columbia or with other family members working on sugar beet farms. It was not until 1949, well after the 1945 surrender of Japan that ended the Second World War, that the dispersed Japanese families were allowed to return to British Columbia where they originally resided. However, most Japanese chose to remain in the newly resettled areas, and brought with them their practice of Buddhism to areas outside British Columbia. In 1988, as a result of a redress movement, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney offered a formal apology to Japanese Canadians and a compensation of \$21,000 each to the survivors of wartime detention.
- 2 The Canadian government passed The Chinese Immigration Act in 1885 to levy a head tax on the Chinese who had immigrated to Canada. The act was further revised in 1900 and 1904, each time increasing the tax exponentially, from the originally \$50 per head in 1885 to \$500 in 1904. The act received a further revision in 1923, when the prohibitive tax was replaced by a ban on Chinese immigrants altogether (with the exception of students and some “elite” groups such as diplomats). It was not until 2006, a result of a redress movement, that the Canadian government, represented by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, offered an official apology and \$20,000 compensation to the survivors or their spouses.
- 3 See <http://www.buddhismcanada.com>.