Buddhism in Australia

Traditions in change

Edited by
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Preface

Many Buddhisms in Australia: continuity and accommodation

Martin Baumann

For the last two decades, the analysis of Buddhism in the West has brought forward numerous studies that scrutinize the development, transformation and current status of Buddhism in North America and Europe. More recently, similar efforts have been made to document Buddhism in South America, Africa and Australia. In 1989 Paul Croucher published a detailed, chronologically arranged history (*Buddhism in Australia 1848–1988*) focusing on Buddhist pioneers, teachers and organizations. Now, two decades later, *Buddhism in Australia: Traditions in Change*, by Cristina Rocha and Michelle Barker, not only continues to narrate this story, but it also opens the field to a multiplicity of disciplinary and methodological approaches. Furthermore, this volume brings together scholars studying the arrival and localization of Buddhism in Australia and prominent Buddhist teachers and community members involved in forming, adapting and indigenizing Buddhist practices and concepts.

Whenever Buddhist ideas and practices, roles and organizational forms have settled in a new culture and society, they have maintained and preserved the tradition in addition to adapting and changing it. The notion of 'tradition' – of handing on ideas and rituals – expresses processes of continuation and transformation. In the course of the last 2500 years, the teachings of the North Indian ascetic, Buddha Shakyamuni, have developed into adapted localized forms appropriate to each new culture and society that the teachings have entered. It may well be argued that it is more appropriate to speak of a plurality of 'Buddhisms', each marked by the specific adaptations made to the culture, norms, rules and religions of each new host society. In this way, traditions and (sub)schools of Burmese, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Tibetan, Cambodian and many more culturally coined 'Buddhisms' have come into being as a result of century-long processes.

Although Buddhist teachings, persons and rituals first came to Australia in the nineteenth century, it is only in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that Buddhism has gained a lasting footing in Australian multicultural society. This timely volume narrates the story in detail: examining how Buddhist concepts, practices, images and organizational structures have become a part of the religious plurality existent in Australia. Like many other western nation-states, Australia has become a place in which the varieties of different Buddhist traditions and schools meet.

This volume highlights the fact that Buddhism in Australia is very much a part of a globalized Buddhism. Processes of globalization are occurring alongside processes of particularization that endeavour to indigenize Buddhism to Australian culture and society. Over time, these developments will lead to the development of a multifaceted Australian Buddhism. The Buddhist journey of preserving and changing the tradition thus continues, accommodating Buddhist practices, ideas, roles and structures to the needs of the new cultural environment.

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Thich Thong Phap (2009) 'A Life of High Adventure: Integrating the monk and the pastor', *Journal of the Tertiary Campus Ministry Association*, 3 (1): 101–07.

Waitt, G. (2003) 'A place for Buddha in Wollongong, New South Wales? Territorial rules in the place-making of sacred spaces', *Australian Geographer*, 34 (2): 223–38.

Abbreviations

AABCP	Australian Association of Buddhist Counsellors and Psychotherapists
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CPE	clinical pastoral education
FPMT	Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition
FWBO	Friends of the Western Buddhist Order
ITCA	Insight Teachers' Circle of Australia
LGA	local government area
LPP	Liberation Prison Project
NSW	New South Wales
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
SGI	Sōka Gakkai International
TBRL	team-based right livelihood
WBD	Wat Buddha Dhamma
WBO	Western Buddhist Order (now known as Triratna Buddhist Order)

Introduction

Michelle Barker and Cristina Rocha

In late 2009 people driving down one of Sydney's busiest roads, stopping when the lights turned red, could look up in the sky to see the Dalai Lama looking down at them from an oversized billboard on top of a building. Next to him stood the question: 'Our Future: Who is Responsible?' This was an advertising campaign carried by the Dalai Lama in Australia organization that was managing his teaching events and his participation in the annual 'Mind and Its Potential' conference in Australia. The campaign erected nine large billboards in key city sites for five weeks that stayed lit up all night. The same image also circulated on about 30 buses for the same period; smaller posters were put up in many cafes and on light poles and bus stops. This was the Dalai Lama's seventh visit to Australia; the first one had been in 1982. In an interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Lynn Bain (general manager of the Dalai Lama in Australia organization) observed: 'You don't have to be Buddhist to connect to His Holiness is what we're trying to say' (Harvey 2009).

Since winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, the Dalai Lama's popularity has enabled Tibetan Buddhism to reach a much larger audience in the Western world. This is particularly so because of the Dalai Lama's emphasis on general, positive values such as happiness, harmony with the environment, and compassion. This is enhanced by the fact that the international media have been enthusiastic in embracing Buddhism generally as trendy and exotic (Baumann 1995; Baumann and Prebish 2002: 1; Rocha 2006: 130–4). This is equally the case in Australia. When the Dalai Lama arrived in Australia he gained much media coverage. As for previous visits, large audiences flocked to his talks.

The Dalai Lama's visits illustrate one aspect of the Australian encounter with Buddhism. Buddhism in Australia is best described as pluralistic, as a substantial number of Buddhist traditions, schools and lineages have taken root. In 2006 Buddhists accounted for 2.1 per cent of Australia's population, almost doubling the 1996 figures, and making it the fastest growing religion in Australia. The number of Buddhist adherents in Australia has grown due both to large-scale Asian immigration and the interest of Anglo-Australians. However, Australia's close geographical proximity to Asia has meant that the development of Buddhism in Australia is somewhat different to the growth of Buddhism in other Western countries. This volume seeks to explore the Buddhist experience in Australia, with

particular focus on those elements that differentiate this experience from those of other Western countries.

In this context, *Buddhism in Australia: Traditions in Change* has two objectives. First, it gathers scholarly papers analysing the inception of Buddhism in Australia. Second, it presents analyses by both monastics and teachers of the challenges of spreading Buddhism in Australia to provide a more rounded picture, giving voice to members of the Buddhist community who have been fundamental in making this process possible. This volume is unique in giving an account of the challenges of Buddhism in Australia through academic viewpoints and community representations.

Buddhism in Australia: Traditions in Change adds to the knowledge basis of the adaptations and challenges in disseminating Buddhism in a country in which very little has been written on the subject.[1] This volume endeavours to fill this gap. It addresses several aspects of the localization of Buddhism in Australia, such as changes to the landscape of cities and rural areas due to construction of temples and stupas, the ordination of women, the contribution of engaged Buddhism, the role of temples as sources of support for first and second generation migrant communities and the ways in which aboriginal spirituality interacts with Buddhism in Australia. *Buddhism in Australia: Traditions in Change* also contributes to comparative analyses on the spread of Buddhism in the West as some of these aspects have also been identified as relevant in the development of Buddhism in other Western countries. To this end, the chapters in this volume strive to emphasize that the development of Buddhism in Australia does not happen in a vacuum, but is part of an intense flow of ideas, teachers, students, practices and material culture between Australia and other countries.

This introduction provides the historical, political and social background to enable understanding of the specifics of the development of Buddhism in Australia, in addition to the similarities shared with other Western nations. This chapter begins by detailing the history of Buddhism in Australia and, subsequently, Australia's relationship with Asia. This is followed by a discussion on how the policy of multiculturalism has resulted in power inequalities between Anglo and Asian Buddhist Australians. This chapter ends with a discussion of the similarities and differences between Buddhism in Australia and the West.

History of Buddhism in Australia

Historical studies on Buddhism in Australia are limited, but Croucher's in-depth, historical study of Buddhism in Australia from 1848 to 1988 is a seminal work (1989). Abeyagunawardena provides a more recent overview (2009) and Spuler's (2000) analysis of Buddhism in Australia identifies six key periods as follows:

1. *Immigrant origins*. In 1848 Chinese and Sri Lankan immigrants started arriving in Australia bringing Buddhism with them.
2. *The first organizations*. In 1925 the first Anglo-Australian organizations were established. As in other the Western countries, the members of these organizations regarded Buddhism as a philosophy 'fully consonant with scientific thinking' rather than a religion (Croucher 1989: 54–5). This is a characteristic still shared with contemporary American and European Buddhism.
3. *The first visits by teachers*. In1952 the first Buddhist teacher arrived in Australia, an American-born nun. Other visits followed and more organizations were established, including a Sōka Gakkai group after the visit of its president, Daisaku Ikeda, in 1964. Bowen's chapter in this volume provides an updated account of the challenges and adaptations the group has undergone since then. In this period women played a strong role in the dissemination of ideas on Buddhism in Australia, another characteristic of Buddhism in Western countries.
4. *The first residential teachers and establishment of monasteries*. In 1971 the first Buddhist monastery was established in Katoomba, New South Wales, with a Sri Lankan as its resident monk. Other monasteries soon followed.
5. *Rapid Asian immigration and increasing diversification of traditions*. After the White Australia Policy was phased out in the 1970s and with the end of the Vietnam War in 1974–5, refugees from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam arrived in large numbers. A small number of Tibetan refugees also arrived around this time. In 1974 the first visit by Tibetan lamas took place. The founders of the Foundation for the Preservation of Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) Tradition, Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa, began teaching in Queensland. Since then, as in other Western countries, Tibetan Buddhism has had a disproportionately strong influence on Australian Buddhism when compared to other traditions (McDonnell and Bucknell 1988: 224).
6. *The emergence of ecumenical Buddhist societies*. Beginning with the establishment of the Buddhist Council of Brisbane in 1982, ecumenical societies were established to achieve common goals and to create a visible and active presence in the community, particularly with regard to representation to the various levels of government.

As can be seen from the historical overview, one should be wary of characterizing Buddhism in Australia as a single entity. Australia was exposed to an intense circulation of ideas, teachers, nuns and monks between Asia and the West, in addition to circulation of these within Western countries. Monastics such as Chief Abbot Phra Rajsilaporn exemplify this. Chief Abbot Venerable Phra Rajsilaporn arrived in Australia in 1974 to lead a newly established centre of the Mahamakut Foundation. The Mahamakut Foundation was originally established in 1893 in Thailand by King Rama V and still enjoys support from the Thai government. The Foundation now has eight temples in Australia catering for a range of Asian Buddhists, including Burmese, Sri Lankan, Thai, Malaysian and Singaporean.

Indeed, Baumann argues for an analysis of the flows of Buddhism across the globe (2001). According to Baumann, it is not possible to understand developments in Buddhist in the West by investigating isolated cases. Cox and Griffin highlight the difficulties of national categories in their study of Buddhism in Ireland, suggesting that 'a history of "Buddhism and Ireland" is inevitably a partial

approach to the global history of Buddhism, rather than a separate national analysis' (Cox and Griffin 2009: 95). Rocha's study of Buddhism in Brazil evidences that Brazil was never isolated from global flows of Buddhist ideas, people and material culture (2006). Buddhist teachers, monks, nuns and practitioners have long been circulating throughout the world and the internet has considerably increased this circulation.

Australia's ambivalence toward Asia

The historical relationship between Australia and Asia has impacted on the arrival of Buddhism in Australia in particular ways that differ from other Western countries. The geographical location of Australia as distant from Europe and close to Asia has brought enormous anxiety to some aspects of the Australian psyche. The so-called 'tyranny of distance' has been present since the first British settlers arrived in Australia. As a consequence of this mindset, fears of an Asian invasion have always loomed on the horizon (Gibson 1992; Walker 1999; Papastergiadis 2004; Elder 2007). Such fears gave rise to the Immigration Restriction Act (commonly known as the White Australia Policy), the first law passed by Parliament after Australia was federated in 1901. This policy aimed to ensure the 'purity of white Australian race' (Nicholl 2001: 110) by imposing restrictions on non-white European migration to Australia. As the Australian sociologist, Catriona Elder, notes: 'The different countries of the Asian region were represented as having their eyes on Australia – as always just waiting to invade or overrun the nation' (2007: 12). During World War II, this 'invasion complex', together with the Japanese air raids on Northern Australia and the Japanese midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour, created a myth that there was a threat of a Japanese invasion (Papastergiadis 2004). The myth that Australia was going to be invaded by the Japanese still endures in the Australian popular imagination (Stanley 2002). Undoubtedly, old prejudices and anxieties continued even after the end of the White Australia Policy in 1973. According to Papastergiadis (2004:11):

> The White Australia Policy may have been formally revoked in 1973 but its structural influence in the national imaginary has not entirely receded. Whiteness is still deeply embedded in the nation's self-image and is a pervasive feature of the repertoire of symbols and icons that dominate the representation of social and political life.

The Whitlam Labour government introduced the concept of multiculturalism in 1972, although some argue that the new multicultural policy was just a facade for assimilation (Foster and Stockley 1984: 56; Habel 1992: 12). The first intake of Asian refugees in Australia after the end of the White Australia Policy provides a good example of the effects of old prejudices. Following 10 years of involvement in the war in Vietnam, the Australian government withdrew its troops between 1971 and 1975, simultaneously establishing a policy of accepting South Vietnamese refugees into Australia. The acceptance of Vietnamese migrants occurred as part

of an effort to refashion Australia as a multicultural nation. However, this policy resulted in old fears and anxieties of an Asian invasion surfacing once more. The Australian media were awash with pictures of boats full of refugees arriving on Australia's shores and 'Asians go home' graffiti appeared in the streets. As Elder argues: 'Vietnamese refugees were represented as too different to fit into the nation' (2007: 124). More recently, the climax of this 'fear of invasion' was reached in 2001 during the so-called 'Tampa Crisis' and the 'Children Overboard Affair.'[2] During these events the government and the Australian media created a fear of a Muslim invasion by closely associating these refugees with terrorism. These events took place immediately before the federal elections and helped to ensure the victory of the incumbent Howard government, which campaigned for 'strong border security'.

There is also strong ambivalence towards Asia in other regards. For instance, in 1992 Prime Minister Paul Keating affirmed in his well-known speech, 'Asia in Australia: Knowing Who We Are', that Australia was part of the Asian region and hence Australia should engage with Asia. This view was in stark contrast to the previous emphasis on maintaining strong relations with Britain. This policy of engagement with Asia resulted in outcomes such as increasing funding for Asian languages and culture in secondary and tertiary education. This was part of a larger vision of a multicultural Australia, which Australia's federal Labor government from 1982 to 1996 had pursued as a deliberate and intentional policy. However, while Australian multicultural policies purported to recognize and respect religious plurality, it was difficult to achieve it in practice. Yonetani notes that this engagement with Asia still resonates with a perception of Asia as the 'Northern peril' (2004). According to her analysis, both new and old policies of engagement and fear 'evoked determinist conceptions of the region, reproduced a discourse of fear, and were fuelled by a pervasive paranoia toward its isolation' (2004: 5). Indeed, Yonetani goes on to note that: 'the national subject at the core of such a stance is assumed to be an Anglo-Celtic … [t]he National self is moreover constructed in direct opposition to the outside Asian Other' (2004: 5).

The 1996 election of John Howard, the Conservative Prime Minister, made it clear that Australia continued to see itself as Anglo-Celtic rather than multicultural. Howard won the election on a policy that favoured British and North American connections and promoted disengagement with Asia. This policy was only revoked when Kevin Rudd was elected as the new Mandarin-speaking Prime Minister in 2007. However, Rudd's seeming reorientation to Asia reflected and thrived on the new global engagement with China, not in a particular commitment to Asia in general.

Multiculturalism and its discontents

It is generally agreed that Australia's policy of multiculturalism developed after World War II in response to the economy's need for a larger workforce. However, prior to the emphasis on multiculturalism in the 1970s it was expected that migrants would assimilate into Anglo-Australian culture. According to Elder,

there have always been two different stories of what it is to be Australian: one that Australia is a white nation and the other that Australia is a nation of immigrants. Elder argues that both these stories have always existed and continue to exist side by side (2007: 115). In *White Nation*, Australian–Lebanese anthropologist, Ghassan Hage (1998), addresses both stories. He argues that being white is the dominant narrative of being Australian. Following Bourdieu, Hage sees whiteness as an accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital. The more whiteness one possesses, the more political power one has over the nation. In this context, Anglo-Australians are at the centre of political power, able to manage the nation. It is as if they 'naturally' belonged to the nation. By contrast, those 'Third World looking people' with heavy accents and different *habitus*, as Hage describes them, are in a precarious position at the margins of governmentality (1998: 18). White nationalists turn them into 'the other'; they are excluded from belonging thoroughly to the nation. Importantly, Hage equals this 'objectification' of the other by the conservative right as the celebration of multiculturalism of the left. As seen in the previous section, in both instances the national self – as the powerful legitimate white guardian of the nation – feels entitled to manage and regulate the other.

In a previous publication, Hage explores another facet of the discourse of multiculturalism and whiteness in Australia: 'cosmo-multiculturalism' (1997). According to him: '[Australian] multiculturalism increasingly refers to an experience of cosmopolitan consumption grounded in a reality largely created by international tourism' and not by migrant homebuilding (i.e. the production and consumption of food by migrants, their religious practices, language schools for children, clubs and so forth) (1997: 99). Put simply, Hage argues that White Australia sees multiculturalism as a way to confer cosmopolitanism, sophistication and international distinction to Australia and, by contrast, as a way of distancing itself from the old, English, monocultural self. The White national subject is empowered and enriched by its appropriation of the exotic other. Power inequities are clear when an active 'Anglo' subject consumes food and other cultural artefacts made by a passive 'ethnic' subject.

Many chapters in this book delve into Anglo Australians' social, political and cultural capital vis-à-vis Asian Australians' lack of these. McAra's chapter shows the ease with which Anglo-Australian followers of the FPMT received council approval to construct a large stupa in Bendigo, a town in rural Australia. Indeed, McAra details the Bendigo mayor's vision to use the stupa as a marker of the town's cultural diversity and vibrancy. By contrast, the chapters contributed by Skennar and Waitt evidence the difficulties Asian Buddhists have had in gaining approval for the establishment of temples in Western Sydney. Skennar's chapter details the challenges facing Buddhist communities in Western Sydney in establishing centres, suggesting that these centres should be supported as they assist in securing the social and cultural sustainability of city growth. Tuong Quang Luu also notes the difficulties that the Vietnamese Buddhist community encounter in building places of worship. Waitt reports that approval came when the Wollongong Council decided the temple lent cosmopolitanism and sophistication to an area that had none of these. This is not new. Previous studies have demonstrated

the obstacles Asian Buddhists encounter, particularly at local government level (Croucher 1989: 104–5; Lyall 1989: 12–16; Lyall: 1994: 30–5; and Adam and Hughes 1996: 5). Waitt goes on to call for renewed commitment to multicultural discourses, as equivalence of faiths has yet to be attained.

Buddhism today

A new period has developed in Australian Buddhism since Croucher published his overview of Buddhism in Australia in 1988. This period is characterized by demographic changes and a rise in the number of converts and Buddhist organizations. Indeed, there have been significant changes in the Buddhist population in Australia since Adam and Hughes first published an analysis of available demographic data on Buddhist adherents (1996). Data are provided by the five-yearly Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census. In 2006 Buddhism was the fastest growing religion in Australia. Buddhists accounted for 2.1 per cent of Australia's population, a substantial increase on previous figures, as shown in Table I.1.

However, the census data are not necessarily accurate and are better considered as an indication of Buddhist numbers. Prior to 2001 the census form did not include Buddhism in the list of religions that could be chosen. Buddhists could only note their religious affiliation by choosing the category of 'other religion' and specifically entering Buddhism on the form. It was not until the number of Buddhists rose to more than 1 per cent of the population (in the 1996 census) that the form for the following census in 2001 was changed to include Buddhism in the religion category. It must also be taken into account that many converts to Buddhism do not view Buddhism as a religion, but as a philosophy or way of life and may not classify themselves as Buddhists.

In tandem with this increase in Buddhist adherents, there has been a rise in Buddhist organizations – from 308 in 1998 to 570 in 2006 (Barker 2007). An analysis of the 308 organizations that existed in 2000 classified these into Buddhist traditions/lineage is probably equally applicable to the 2010 figures: Mahayana 34 per cent, Theravada 25 per cent, Vajrayana 27 per cent and non-sectarian 14 per cent (Spuler 2002). Non-sectarian organizations include hospices, engaged Buddhist groups, libraries and bookstores. Vasi provides a more recent analysis of Buddhist organizations in the state of Victoria and provides a detailed description of 16 representative Buddhist organizations (2005). Ecumenical Buddhist societies have continued to grow. Although achievements of these ecumenical groups have

Table I.1 Demographics of Australian Buddhists, 1991–2006

	1991	*1996*	*2001*	*2006*
Percentage of population	0.8%	1.1%	1.9%	2.1%
Numbers of adherents	139,795	199,812	357,813	418,749

Source: Adam and Hughes 1996: 41; ABS 2006, 2007

been historically limited (Bucknell 1992), two chapters in this book (Bubna-Litic and Higgins, and Cousens) attest to the continuing desire for such ecumenism and demonstrate the benefits of this.

Bouma argues that 'migration has been the major factor in the radical increasing religious diversity in Australia' (2003: 59). Indeed, in 2006 69 per cent of Buddhists (288,100) were born overseas (ABS 2007). Of these, nearly 250,000 were from Asian countries. It is noteworthy, however, that 5,994 were born in the United Kingdom. Table I.2 lists the top 15 Asian countries in which Australian Buddhists were born.

However, Bouma also observes that 'the recent increase among Buddhists cannot be entirely explained by migration' (2003: 59). There has been a rise in the number of converts. This is similar to what has been occurring in other Western settings, probably due to the credibility Buddhism carries in the West and to the fact that in recent decades Australians have become 'spiritual' rather than 'religious' (Bouma 2006: 62). This has been accompanied by an expansion of the religious market through migration, travel and increased globalization.

In Australia, the expansion of the New Age movement has translated into a rise of alternative spiritualities (Bouma 2006: 61–3). Although census figures tend to lack the refinement of in-depth research, they can provide a general idea of the field. For instance, the number of Australians identifying with nature religions has increased. In 1996 these constituted 10,000 (0.05 per cent of the population); in 2001 this number rose to 23,000 (0.12 per cent of the population) and, by 2006, had reached 29,396 (0.15 per cent). Bouma argues that 'the rise of Pagan and

Table I.2 Birthplace of Australian Buddhists, 2006

Country of birth	*Number of adherents*
Vietnam	93,608
China (excludes SARs and Taiwan Province)	36,279
Malaysia	23,547
Thailand	23,142
Cambodia	19,582
Sri Lanka	19,331
Taiwan	9,738
Japan	8,645
Hong Kong (SAR of China)	7,580
Laos	7,213
Indonesia	5,567
Singapore	4,654
Burma (Myanmar)	4,109
Korea, Republic of (South)	3,501
East Timor	2,060

Source: ABS 2006, Country of Birth of Person and Religious Affiliation by Australia

New Age spiritualities is largely attributable to changes in religious identity in response to the globalization of ideas about religion' (2003: 55). Two other developments have contributed to this spiritual renewal. First, there has been a decline in mainline Protestant groups (for instance, Anglicans are now 18.5 per cent of the population, while they comprised 40 per cent in 1947). Second, there is an increase in the number of Australians who identify as 'no religion' in the census – from 15.5 per cent in 2001 to 18.7 per cent in 2006.

Given these three developments – an increase in spiritualities of choice, a decline in institutionalized religion and an increase of 'no religion' – it is highly likely that increasing numbers of Australians are migrating from institutionalized religions to a more fluid spirituality. Indeed, Bouma has called attention to the fact that the number of people whose religion was 'inadequately described' has increased 552 per cent between the 1996 and 2001 censuses (nearly 2 per cent of the population). When Bouma accessed people's written responses to their religion in the 'other' box, he found that the 'word spiritual was the most frequent choice' (2003: 65). According to Bouma: 'the growth of meditation and spirituality centres provides further evidence of the change and regeneration of Australian religious and spiritual life' (2006:162). This is supported by Tacey, who found in 2003 that religious and spiritual revitalization was occurring in Australia (2003).

However, while Australians are experimenting with a range of spiritualities, converts to Buddhism are not necessarily 'picking and mixing' from diverse religious traditions in New Age fashion. One of the few studies of convert Buddhists in Australia concluded that their approach to practice was not New Age; rather that convert Buddhists in this study 'located themselves within a discrete spiritual tradition in a relatively stable manner … At the core of the practice is disciplined and regular meditation, combined with detailed study of Buddhist philosophy as it is documented in advanced texts and scriptures' (Phillips and Aarons 2005: 219–20). Fitzpatrick's analysis of Tibetan Buddhist practices in this volume suggests that the meaning of traditional religious practices are reframed and reapplied to suit the contemporary needs of Australian individuals. This approach is similar to the practices of other Western Buddhists, who blur the boundaries between laicization and monasticism.

Buddhist practice is changing subtly in other ways. The Australian website, BuddhaNet, exemplifies the increasing effects of the internet. BuddhaNet is a non-sectarian Buddhist information and education network, administered by the Buddha Dharma Education Association that provides online resources from all Buddhist traditions. Venerable Pannyavaro, the webmaster of BuddhaNet, Founder and President of the Buddha Dharma Education Association and a Vice-President of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, sees possibilities for changing the way Buddhism is taught through use of online resources. Venerable Pannyavaro (2004) suggests:

> The temple approach in teaching the Dharma is through sermons with the teacher and the content being unchallenged. The new way is through group learning via discussion. On the Net it's through chat groups where the teacher or moderator acts as a facilitator for an ongoing debate or discussion.

Western Buddhisms, Australian Buddhisms

Many scholars have used the concept of 'Buddhism in the West' as shorthand for the Buddhism developed in non-Asian countries. While this concept may be helpful as it allows focus on new developments since scholars, travellers, monastics and missionaries brought this religion to Europe; it also ignores the differences in the localization of Buddhism in each country. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that this seemingly clear-cut differentiation between the West and the non-West is implicated in a historical process of establishing inequalities of power between them. Indeed, Hall argues that 'the West' is neither a geographical territory nor a natural entity, but is rather a historically produced category. For Hall, the binary opposition between 'the West' and 'the Rest' is a discursive formation that emerges as a result of a set of historical forces that were central to the formation of Europe's identity. These include the processes of Reformation and Enlightenment as well as Europe's encounter with the 'New World'. Both processes gave Europe a sense of itself, an identity against which other non-Western societies and cultures were measured.

As Hall notes, discourses that rely on the binary opposition between tradition and modernity, West and East, simplify the issue by essentializing the categories of both the West and the Rest, a homogenizing manoeuvre that erases internal distinctions within each category (1992: 280). It is not the aim of this introduction to discuss the problematics of conflating the categories the West/modern and Asia /traditional (Baumann 2001; Lopez 2002; Prebish and Baumann 2002; Heine and Prebish 2003). However, it is useful to note that modern and traditional Buddhism have been historically enmeshed, just as 'the West' and 'the Rest' are historically implicated. Since the late nineteenth century – and with more intensity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – there has been an increasing circulation of Buddhist monastics, students, books, practices and material culture between the West and the non-West and within the West. The presence in Australia of the British Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (now Triratna Buddhist Community) and North American's Diamond Sangha are cases in point and these organizations are represented in this volume in chapters by Nagasuri and Barzaghi, respectively.

It is important to understand that this circulation entails differentiated processes of localization. As Baumann argues, the way Buddhism is localized in each country has more to do with each country's culture than to the religion itself (1997: 287). In the past two decades, scholars have identified a set of characteristics that are present in the development of Buddhism in the West: the plurality of Buddhist traditions in a single country, a diversity of practice for those who converted and those who were born into the religion, blurring of monasticism and lay practice with the consequent diminished role of Buddhist monastics, equality for women, application of democratic principles, emphasis on ethics, secularization (this includes emphasis on the rational nature of Buddhism and its congruence with Western science), linkage to psychological concepts and social engagement (Baumann 1995; Tanaka 1998; Prebish 1999; Queen 1999; Prebish and Baumann 2002; Wallace 2002). Yet the presence and emphasis on each of these characteristics changes from country to country.

Several of these characteristics are present in Australia as well. Spuler's analysis of Buddhism in Australia in 2000 identified a diversity of traditions and lineages, a differentiation between ethnic and convert Buddhism, an emphasis on lay practice, on the application of democratic principles (exemplified by the existence of elected councils), some emphasis on social engagement, and some evidence of secularization (2000: 38–40; Spuler 2003b). The chapters in this volume evidence that these characteristics are alive and more evident a decade later. For instance, Bubna-Litic and Higgins address the differentiation as well as conjunctions of practice between so-called 'ethnic' and 'convert' Buddhism. Lama Choedak Rinpoche is ideally positioned to provide an excellent overview of the differences between these two congregations in terms of practice, understanding and belief, due to his background working with both groups. He was trained as a Tibetan monastic and has been teaching Western followers for many years. His analysis also goes one step further by pointing to the conflicts that arise when different Asian traditions meet in the West.

Vasi's chapter also shows the precarious position of some Cambodian migrants in relation to the dominant white culture, evidencing the benefits of the culturally appropriate support services that temples can provide.[3] While welfare services are provided for migrants by various organizations, Vasi's chapter suggests that large cultural shift would be necessary to enable these Cambodian migrants, who do not speak English and come from a very different cultural background, to successfully access these services. Likewise, Thich Thong Phap's chapter describes Vietnamese youth who are unsure of their place in the nation. While these youth respect their parents' culture, tensions arise as they also feel that they are Australian. Caught between two cultures, they can be ashamed of their parents' culture and the religion that is part of it and consequently shun them. Finally, Bowen's chapter also shows the difficulty Anglo-Australians have when Buddhism in tightly connected to Japanese culture. She argues that as Sōka Gakkai gradually adopts a more Western stance, Anglo-Australian followers are becoming more easily accommodated within the tradition. However, even though Buddhism practices are localizing, 'authenticity' is still an issue. In 2007 Eddy explored the approach to and practice of tantra in the FPMT in Australia, concluding that 'it is evident that the FPMT maintains a strong adherence to the doctrinal foundations of the Gelugpa lineage and its Mahayana orientation' (Eddy 2007). In this volume, Barzaghi discusses her strategies for maintaining the fine balance between tradition and innovation in the Diamond Sangha.

Secularization can be translated into laicization, democratic principles and feminism. Laicization is a characteristic of Australia Buddhism and Bubna-Litic and Higgins demonstrate the difficulties in melding the trappings of monasticism with lay associational expectation. Davis and Barzaghi examine the same issue in relation to Zen Buddhism in their chapters. The contributors included in the second section of this volume exemplify the contemporary emphasis on lay practice, as many of the authors are lay teachers. Kearney's discussion of the Burmese insight meditation tradition notes that the movement represents a transition from tradition to modernity, through its empowerment of the laity and its reorganization of

meditation practice. Lama Choedak Rinpoche notes the challenges in practice and perceptions that monastics face, even suggesting that a secular form of Buddhism is needed.

In other chapters, democratic principles are evidenced in a variety of traditions by the existence of elected managing boards in Buddhist centres, in addition to state and federal Buddhist councils. Barzaghi's chapter examines these issues in relation to the Diamond Sangha Zen Buddhist lineage in Australia, and Cousens' chapter examines the challenges faced by the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils to obtain official recognition of Buddhism as a religion in Australia.

With regard to feminism, some traditions have adopted equality of genders in their Western branches; others find this adaptation highly problematic. Various chapters in this volume include analyses of this issue (Barzaghi, Bowen, Fitzpatrick, Halafoff and Nagasuri). For instance, Fitzpatrick's research on the practice of Green Tara in Australia examines the relevance of gender and feminist concerns to practitioners' relationship to Green Tara.

Another characteristic of Buddhism in the West that is found in Australia is social engagement. Engaged Buddhism in Australia has increased dramatically since Bucknell first wrote on the topic in 2000. Bucknell's work describes Engaged Buddhism in Australia as a phenomenon that began in approximately 1990 and in 2000 was thus 'correspondingly inconspicuous and little noticed, but [it] is nonetheless deserving of attention and recognition' (2000: 468). Sherwood similarly argues that Buddhist organizations in Australia have always provided services concerned with social welfare and education (2001). Engaged Buddhism is one way in which Buddhism affects wider Australian society; Sherwood's research describes Buddhism as a socially transforming force, in areas including palliative care, human rights arenas and education. Sherwood examines the contribution of Buddhist groups in Australia in nine areas: education of adults, education of children, working with the sick and dying in the community, working in hospitals and hospices, working in drug rehabilitation, working with the poor, working in prisons, speaking up for the oppressed and working for non-human sentient beings – the author provides detailed case studies of 12 such organizations (Sherwood 2003).

The work of engaged Buddhist organizations in Australia does not merely benefit an Australian audience. Vasi suggests that Buddhist welfare operations affect the broader society in her study of Buddhist organizations in the state of Victoria (2005: 90). Barker documents expressions of Buddhist religious capital in Australia and places them within a framework that identifies different types of religious capital to improve understanding of both the concept of religious capital and the effects of the ongoing growth of Buddhism in Australia (2007). Buddhist community members such as the Most Venerable Thich Quang Ba play a significant role in the development of engaged Buddhism in Australia. Born in central Vietnam in 1955, he entered monastic life in 1964 and has since spent 25 of his 45 years as a monastic engaging in community services and charitable and human rights activities. The Most Venerable Thich Quang Ba believes that Australia is well placed to bridge global and local issues due to its large Asian population

and his work seeks to connect the Buddhist community in Australia with pressing global concerns (personal communication 2008).

Several chapters in this book contribute to the understanding of engaged Buddhism in Australia. Vasi's chapter addresses the role of the Cambodian temple in assisting in addressing the settlement and welfare needs of the community. She investigates how the temple helps the elderly to overcome isolation and mental illness, and provides positive role models to the young. Thich Thong Phap's chapter also deals with the ways in which his own presence as an Anglo-Australian monk provides a positive role model to a second generation Vietnamese student. Halafoff discusses Venerable Robina Curtin's work in prisons all over the world; while Sherwood writes about her own work in Buddhist teaching in tertiary education. Cousens describes the work of the Buddhist Council of Victoria in developing a primary school religious instruction syllabus, working with Buddhist prisoners from non-English-speaking background and in the palliative care sector. Davis notes that the Jikishoan Zen Buddhist Community is involved in outreach Buddhist chaplaincy program in prisons and the teaching of Zen meditation in a drug rehabilitation centre in Melbourne. Finally, Barzaghi's discussion of new types of Zen Buddhist retreat includes mention of the creation of engaged Buddhist retreats at the Sydney Zen centre.

The challenge of transmitting Buddhism to second generation Asian-Australians is present in other Western countries. Tuong Quang Luu's chapter address the difficulties temples and first generation migrants face attracting the second generation. Vasi's chapter also demonstrates the role temples play in attracting and assisting second generation. Additionally, the links between Buddhism and psychology (discussed in this volume by Kearney, Barzaghi and Sherwood) are found in other Western countries. For Kearney, creating a context for students to understand Buddhist concepts is a complex affair. He argues that in the Australian Insight Movement, 'insight' is a vague concept and that insight practitioners usually apply it to understanding their own psychological processes. Both Barzaghi and Sherwood are psychotherapists and teach Buddhism. While Barzaghi has organized several national conferences on the intersections between Buddhism and psychotherapy and has her own private practice, Sherwood teaches Buddhist techniques such as meditation and mindfulness to improve mental health at Sophia College.

In contrast, chapters in this volume also address some characteristics that seem to be particularly Australian. Cousens explores the obstacles that must be overcome for Buddhism to be recognized as a religion by the Australian government. Religions in Australia are defined by the presence of a wedding ceremony, which Buddhism lacks. Another characteristic of Buddhism in Australia is its seemingly anti-authoritarian stance. Chapters by Davis and Bowen analyse the ways in which Anglo-Australian Zen and Sōka Gakkai followers wrestle with the authoritarian and hierarchical Japanese Buddhist traditions. This is particularly striking in the case of Zen, since it is perceived in the West as anti-authoritarian. In *The Australian Legend*, Ward analyses the connection between the so-called 'Australian national character' and anti-authoritarianism. He notes:

> According to the myth the 'typical Australian' is a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others. He's a great improviser, ever willing 'to have a go' at anything ... He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better, and so he is a great 'knocker' of eminent people ... He's a fiercely independent person who hates officiousness an authority, especially when these qualities are embodied in military officers and policemen.
>
> (Ward 1992: 179–80)

For Ward, this national character was constructed with characteristics derived from the bushmen ('outback employees, semi-nomadic drovers, shepherds, shearers, bullock-drivers, stockmen, boundary-riders, and station-hands') of the nineteenth century (1992: 180). Most of these were in fact convicts or ex-convicts and were men who were fiercely independent and practical due to their nomadic life. Although this is not a lifestyle or a profession that is pervasive in contemporary Australia, this national myth nonetheless continues to affect how the nation perceives itself. Halafoff's chapter observes that the media employ these same qualities (e.g. 'matter-of-fact Aussie attitude', 'easy going style') to describe the FPMT Australia nun, Venerable Robina Curtin.

Finally, the intermingling of Australian indigenous spirituality and Zen Buddhism is noteworthy. The profile of Anglo-Australian Buddhists – tertiary educated, urban, leaning towards the left and well off – facilitates this phenomenon (Philips and Aarons 2005: 221). Anglo-Australian Buddhists from this sociodemographic possess knowledge of, and respect for, indigenous cultures that make them keen to bridge the gap and find commonalities between both cultures. In a previous article, McAra examined the relationship between a FPMT Tibetan Buddhist group in rural Australia and the Aboriginal owners of the land, exploring how the FPMT sought to acknowledge and accommodate the original owners, to achieve an outcome where 'Aboriginal concepts of land-based spirituality and Tibetan Buddhist strategies for establishing the Dharma in new places momentarily came into an unusual relationship' (McAra 2007).

In her chapter, Barzaghi concludes that indigenous spirituality and Zen Buddhism share the wisdom of interconnectedness and that much can be learned from the spiritual relationship of indigenous Australians to their land and sense of place. Elsewhere, Buddhism has been connected to the ecological movement (Harris 1995), but there is very little written about the connections Western Buddhists make between Buddhism and indigenous spirituality or how indigenous people in Western countries have reacted to the arrival of Buddhism on their land (McAra 2007). The intermingling of Australian indigenous spirituality and Buddhism may begin a new flow of ideas and practices that, while originating in Australia, will circulate the globe.

Conclusion

Buddhism in Australia shares many characteristics in common with Buddhism in other Western countries. However, localizations and adaptations also reflect differences due to historical, geographic and political factors. Buddhism in Australia can be seen to have been influenced by the specifics of the Australian situation, its proximity to Asia, its multiculturalist policies and its relationships with Buddhism in Europe and America. The result is the existence of many Buddhisms in Australia; traditions that are in a state of change.

A good example of the fact that Buddhism in Australia is not only derivative of Buddhism in other Western countries (although heavily influenced by it) are the events that took place at the Bodhinyana Monastery in Perth in late 2009. The Bodhinyana Monastery endeavoured to revive the bhikkhuni lineage by fully ordaining four bhikkhunis without authorization from either the elders of the tradition or Thai Buddhist authorities. The very public and acrimonious dispute that followed resulted in the expulsion of the Bodhinyana Monastery from the Wat Pah Pong lineage and the excommunication of the dharma teacher, Phra Brahmavamso, popularly known as Ajahn Brahm, for sponsoring the ordination. The incident in Australia had repercussions for other Thai temples in the West. According to *The Bangkok Post*, the forest monks of the Wat Nong Pah Pong lineage were pressuring the Council of Elders and the Office of National Buddhism in Thailand, 'to impose stricter controls on Western monks to stop them from ordaining women. They also want the properties of Thai temples in the West to come under the ownership of the Thai Sangha to ensure complete control' ('Thai Monks Target Western Clergy' 2009). Many Buddhist teachers, some of which are contributors to this book, have signed a statement of support for the full ordination of bhikkhunis.

Through examples like this, it can be seen that Buddhist traditions in Australia are truly plural. They range from those who maintain close links with their origins, to others who forge new ground. The chapters that follow, written by both monastics and teachers involved in spreading Buddhism in Australia, further illustrate this.

Notes

1 These include publications by Croucher (1989), Spuler (2000, 2002) and Abeyagunawardena (2009); and a special issue of the *Journal of Global Buddhism*, 'Buddhism in Oceania' (2008) that includes chapters on Buddhism in Australia by Bubna-Litic and Higgins (2007), Eddy (2007) and McAra (2007). A detailed bibliography of earlier references can be found in an annotated bibliography compiled by Spuler (2003a).

2 In the first incident, a ship called *Tampa* picked up refugees who were on a leaky boat off the coast of Australia. The Howard government refused to allow the refugees to be processed in Australia. In the Children Overboard Affair, the Howard government claimed that refugees had thrown their own children overboard so that they would be rescued and able to secure entrance in Australia. An Australian inquiry later found that no children had been thrown overboard and that the government knew this prior to the election, which they ended up winning.

3 Adam's earlier investigation of whether religion provides a source of alienation or a means to integration for Vietnamese Buddhist and Catholic migrants in Western Australia similarly concluded that latter was the case (1995). Other studies in this area include Bouma's work on religious settlement, identity and cultural diversity in Australia (1996); and Vasi's needs analysis of the Cambodian community in Victoria (2008).

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Part I

Academics

1 The emergence of secular insight practice in Australia

David Bubna-Litic and Winton Higgins

In Australia over the last three decades, secular insight (vipassana) meditation practice has increasingly drawn away from its Theravadin origins, thus exemplifying a wider trend in western Buddhist circles over the second half of the last century, to loosen ties with their Asian traditions of origin. In 1998 Batchelor articulated the divergence by drawing a contrast between 'religious Buddhism' and 'dharma practice' in his *Buddhism without Beliefs* (Batchelor 1998a), a contrast with resonances in the changes now unfolding in Australia. He elaborated his key concepts, not least the 'deep agnosticism' he discerned in the Buddha's own teaching, in other writings published in the same year (Batchelor 1998b; 1998c). The contrast acknowledges a strong tendency towards secularization in the re-rendering of Buddhism in culturally appropriate terms for westerners who, from the 1970s, began to practise meditation seriously in this tradition in significant numbers.

As Gombrich and Obeyesekere remind us, however, this trend now visible in western countries such as Australia has Asian (not least Sri Lankan) precedents going back to the last three decades of the nineteenth century (1998: chapter 6). The elements of that earlier Asian Buddhist confrontation with modernity included a fresh re-reading of canonical texts, promotion of serious lay dharma practice, scepticism towards claims to orthodoxy, monastic authority and the efficacy of ritual, and dismissal of the folkloric accretions to popular observance. All resurfaced in the late twentieth century developments in western countries.

In Australia, however, their expression has been mediated and complicated, both through being melded with central western moral concepts and through the growth of serious dharma practice from the 1970s, at a time when the certitudes of modernity were to some extent giving way to an embrace of uncertainty, ambivalence and fragmentation. This embrace has often attracted the catchall (but contested and unstable) term, 'postmodernity'. We thus need to hold lightly any classificatory schema – be it 'traditional' versus 'modern' Buddhism or Martin Baumann's (2001) suggested heuristic periodization of Buddhism into canonical, traditional, modern and today's 'global' stages (1998: chapter 6).[1] Nevertheless, as long as we honour its heuristic intent, appreciation of Buddhism's current global character helpfully sensitizes us to the dangers of accounting for current developments in parochial (western or national) terms, while avoiding the ironically

totalizing assumptions of postmodern theory. In what follows, then, we present Australian developments in insight (vipassana) meditation practice as specific illustrations of global trends rather than as components of a national exceptionalism. More than ever today, little sense can be made of Buddhism in any one country without reference to this global context.

The authors are both veteran dharma practitioners and have gleaned the local historical content presented in this article from their own active engagement in (often intermingling) Zen, Theravadin and insight groups on the Australian eastern seaboard over the last two decades. The first named author recently completed a doctoral dissertation on the relation between experiential outcomes of long-term Zen and insight meditation practice among senior teachers of the discipline in various western countries, on the one hand, and, on the other, the foundational assumptions about the self in economic theory. The second author fulfilled teaching and administrative roles in (among others) Wat Buddha Dhamma and the Buddhist Library and Meditation Centre in Sydney (which feature as prominent examples in the following) and is a member of the Insight Teachers' Circle of Australia. The events described in this chapter are drawn from discussions with key actors, firsthand and participant observations of significant meetings and a continual flow of internal written and verbal communications within the organizations concerned.

Background: modern and global Buddhist developments in the west

In one sense, there is nothing special about adapting Buddhism to a new cultural environment – in this case, the west. It is a process that has occurred many times before, for instance, in China from the first century CE; Faure even argues that this example is still unfolding (1993). A notable (albeit not unprecedented) feature of the western adaptation, however, is the relative eclipse of monasticism and the emphasis on lay practice in lay settings. Monasticism has historically underpinned and dominated Buddhist survival and development in most other times and places and lay dharma practice has typically functioned as a mere adjunct of monastic practice.

Many of the generation of teachers who brought serious dharma practice to the west from the 1970s onwards (including Robert Aitken, Christina Feldman, Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, Sharon Salzberg and Christopher Titmuss) had received intensive monastic training in Asia. Despite the acknowledged legacy of monastic institutions in Asia, these teachers returned to the west and insight (or vipassana) teachers in particular taught dharma practice in ways that made no necessary references to the monastic world at all. Instead, they established pioneering (and these days, internationally pivotal) lay institutions for intensive meditation practice, above all Gaia House in the United Kingdom and the Insight Meditation Society and Spirit Rock in the United States. This development diffused throughout other western countries, not least the English-speaking ones – a matter we will return to when considering the Australian example.

At first the abandonment of monastic integuments excited little comment. With some exceptions in Burma, monasteries in Asia neither taught laity the finer points of meditation nor offered them intensive residential meditation retreats. If laypeople in the west sought these boons, then a degree of institutional creativity was self-evidently required to provide them. That creativity was successful, but it often took time for the all-important ethical implications inherent in institutional choice to crystallize. When they did so, the ensuing tensions highlighted the way in which western forms of association, above all the model of the voluntary association, rested on the core western moral values of equality, inclusiveness and collective self-rule.

In this embryonic decade of the 1970s, the west was coming under the influence of second-wave feminism, the peace movement, various other democratic protest movements and the broader counterculture, all of which sought to cultivate the values in question. Buddhism as such enjoyed a 'radical' reputation in the west, thanks to such influences as the Beat Poets and popular writings about Buddhism, such as those of Alan Watts. Thus many western Buddhists took for granted an elective affinity – the institutional hallmarks of traditional Buddhism notwithstanding – between the dharma, on the one hand, and the egalitarian, universalist zeitgeist of the 1970s, on the other. In several western countries, Buddhist intentional communities sprang up and melded dharmic principles with countercultural ideals.

In hindsight, the irony of imputing radicalism to religious or traditional Buddhism is clear. As with any other large-scale institutionalized religion, Buddhist monasticism in its homelands was strongly aligned with sociopolitical elites and adapted to their hegemonic values. Buddhist monastic institutions were socially and politically embedded: they performed social-integrative and regime-legitimizing functions. Many western dharma practitioners only gradually came to realize that these institutions presented a tableau of resilient hierarchy, authoritarianism, patriarchy, dogmatism, ritualism, social conservatism and superstition. But by bracketing these features of inherited institutional forms as mere culturally biased interpretations of the dharma, western practitioners tended to trivialize the moral significance of such forms of association.

A couple of factors fed this naiveté. First, the Asian de-emphasis of intensive lay practice encouraged an assumption in the west that other values would 'of course' assert themselves once laypeople accounted for a majority of serious practitioners. Second, a significant group of westerners were aware of Buddhism's historical reliance on monastic institutions and at first saw that reliance as inevitable in the west as well. Third, monastic institutions that had developed in relationship with lay communities had, necessarily, learned that survival depends on deflecting conflict with them. The result was institutional practices that honed the art of sending conciliatory signals while resisting substantive change.

Fourth, monastic Buddhism itself at first appeared adaptable when quasi-monastic dharmic movements emerged and established themselves internationally. The most notable of these hybrids was the (interdenominational) Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, founded in Britain in 1968. This movement sought to partially replicate full-blown monasticism, maintaining a range of monastic organizational

vestiges such as lineage-based dharma transmission, quasi-ordination procedures, ritual and hierarchical authority. (The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order from its inception included a semi-autonomous nucleus, the Western Buddhist Order, which resurrected monastic hierarchy, nomenclature and usage to a considerable degree.) Similar hybrid forms appeared, for instance, with the (Zen) Diamond Sangha, which continued lineage-based dharma transmission and, in the sphere of insight meditation, the monastic-blessed lay associations connected to the tradition of Mahasi Sayadaw.

Inevitably, however, a clash of fundamental moral principles,[2] above all over the inclusion of women on equal terms, was bound to emerge in institution building. If the new vehicles of dharma practice in the west were not monastic, then what were they? In practice, they readily fell into that familiar category of western civil society – the voluntary association. At least in the wake of second-wave feminism and comparable demands for civic diversity, the ethos of western associational life has tended to be rationalist, egalitarian, inclusive and democratic. In particular, decision makers typically have to face regular elections and discussion of the group's affairs must proceed without undue influence, let or hindrance. Westerners who commit their time, energy and money to a voluntary activity of any kind might reasonably expect to enjoy full rights of membership and thus to exercise an influence over it equal to that of any other activists.

So long as an aura of religiosity surrounded dharma practice, the demands of normal western principles of association could to some extent be deflected by appeals to spiritual authority. But that aura inexorably faded the further dharma practice removed itself from monastic tutelage and the more the bounds of that authority began to be questioned.

The Australian 'dharma scene'

International influences and networks have moulded endeavours to establish dharma practice in the various western countries. Prominent western dharma teachers have tended to globalize their activities and lead meditation retreats in a number of different countries. Especially since the introduction of the world wide web in the mid-1990s, Australian dharma practitioners in particular have taken the opportunity to overcome their geographical isolation by not only going on retreat with overseas teachers, but also by following developments in (and debates around) dharma practice and doctrine occurring in locales a long way from their native shores. The search for an 'Australian Buddhism', then, will yield only an oxymoron.

Many individuals who would later become influential teachers of insight meditation in Australia originally spent time in Asia, sometimes in robes, in Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand. On their return, they typically also returned to lay life and practised either in the quasi-monastic centres of the Mahasi tradition or in entirely lay forms.

Practitioners with Asian experience were prominent among those who, in the 1970s, established two still extant Buddhist intentional communities in the rural

Northern Rivers region of New South Wales: Bodhi Farm and the Dharmananda community. These communities occupied adjoining land in spectacular rainforest and quickly established the Forest Meditation Centre, which became a magnet for those who wanted to practise insight meditation and a dharmic way of life that was self-evidently radical and non-monastic. It attracted a range of prominent overseas teachers, including Christina Feldman, Joseph Goldstein, Thich Nhat Hanh and Christopher Titmuss, to run retreats there; the last named has maintained his influence in the area since that time. When insight practice established itself in nearby Brisbane, especially in the main lay insight sangha, DharmaCloud, the institutional ethos of the Northern Rivers set the tone there as well. Clearly, contact with monastic Buddhism has been negligible from the beginning.

Quite a different dynamic occurred in the major cities other than Brisbane, under the influence of the enormous influx of 'ethnic' Buddhists in successive waves of Asian migration. Thanks to them, Buddhism as such has for some time been the country's fastest growing religion, as well as the country's largest non-Christian one (2.1 per cent of the population, according to the 2006 census). Australian dharma practitioners of western background tend to be urban and middle class and Buddhist migrants (like most migrant groups) are largely concentrated in the big cities as well, but are predominantly working class. From the 1970s, the institutions of the immigrant 'born Buddhists', with their faith-inspiring ancient antecedents, often appealed to western converts. And while the 'ethnic' Buddhist institutions focused on upholding the immigrants' ethnic identity, some of their leaders realized the value of engaging with local western Buddhists, who could articulate and bolster their own position in the host society. Also, the converts' presence was thought to help convince the migrants' children that Buddhism was not a mere relic of their parents' old world, but rather something universally valuable that attracted modern westerners as well.

For these reasons, western and Asian Buddhists probably tended to fraternize in Australian cities more than they did in most other western environments. This co-mingling sometimes took institutional forms, albeit ones that came to exemplify what Numrich dubbed 'intersection without interaction' and 'parallel congregations' (1996: 63, 67). But enthusiasm for mutual contact for a time papered over the underlying conflict between the associational values that inhere in traditional religious institutions, on the one hand, and western voluntary associations, on the other. A crucial example is Wat Buddha Dhamma (WBD), established in 1978 in the wilderness of the Dharug National Park less than two hours' drive north of Sydney, the country's largest city. WBD's mission was to provide a setting in which interested Sydneysiders and their near neighbours could learn and practise the dharma. The two founders (both of whom would enjoy international reputations) were an English-born Theravadin monk, Phra Khantipalo, and a German-Jewish refugee, Ilse Ledermann, who was shortly thereafter ordained, becoming Ayya Khema. Khantipalo had had a long monastic training both in India but especially Thailand and came with a formidable international reputation as a Pali scholar.

The project received the enthusiastic support of both western devotees and migrant communities from Thailand, Sri Lanka and Burma in particular. In

hindsight, the early cooperation between these two contrasting constituencies was remarkable, with the 80 hectares occupied by up to 30 residents living the hippy dream with all its lifestyle implications and regularly visited by devout Asian Buddhists who came to give dana, earn merit and enact their time-honoured rituals.

At the time there were no known precedents for such a centre and little thought was given to the principles of association underpinning what soon became one of the country's most important incubators of western dharma practice. WBD's establishment predated today's major examples of large lay-based dharmic institutions in the west. Its newsletter, *Bodhi Leaf*, proclaimed the new institution to be a 'Buddhist monastery–lay community–retreat centre', with an abbot (Phra Khantipalo) and a committee of lay residents in charge. Its rudimentary constitution required that any future abbot, like the first incumbent, be 'a Bikkhu of the Dhammayut Theravada tradition', but beyond that it neither laid claim to the centre for any particular Buddhist sect nor specified what was meant by the word 'monastery' in its mixed self-characterization.

For most of the community, the word 'monastery' (or *wat* in Thai) was, in the absence of any alternative model, effectively conterminous with any place of Buddhist practice. There is scant evidence that anyone involved intended WBD to operate as an orthodox Theravadin monastery: it was surrounded by wilderness rather than a supportive town or village that could deliver the necessary support such an institution requires on a daily basis. By the same token, the involvement and enthusiasm of the lay residents over WBD's first decade is still evident today in the many buildings completed in that period, including a large meditation hall that is always greatly admired. It also sported a rudimentary primary school for children living in the community. Women were prominent in its affairs; it hosted retreats by monastic and lay teachers of Theravadin, Zen and Tibetan persuasion. Those who led early retreats there included Robert Aitken, Joseph Goldstein and Thich Nhat Hanh.

In the late 1980s, however, WBD began to experience difficulties, the first of which showed how external forces could impact on such hybrid institutions. The hardening of economic conditions and the tightening of government labour market and welfare policies made it increasingly difficult for WBD residents to take time out from normal employment and their numbers dwindled precipitously, such that a small and numerically volatile community of six or so was left to maintain its now considerable infrastructure and mount its retreat program.

The second difficulty WBD faced revealed the fragility of the ethical compromise involved in melding the trappings of monasticism with lay associational expectations. The centre's subsequent travails exemplify the tensions between traditional Asian Buddhism and modern western dharma practice. Phra Khantipalo who, in Ayya Khema's long absences, dominated the life of WBD, began to question the Theravadin orthodoxy in general and its gender order in particular. He had nurtured an ecumenical attitude to dharma practice at the centre, including an early sympathy for the Mahayana, and became increasingly interested in it. In the late 1980s, he announced the conclusion that the 'eight serious conditions' imposed on nuns and ascribed to the Buddha in the Pali canon – the Theravada's main doctrinal

support for subordinating and marginalizing women – were, in fact, apocryphal. 'Due to the formulation of these conditions, we may conclude that they are a later insertion by someone who was biased against the ordination of women,' he wrote in *Bodhi Leaf* (1990:10).

His high standing among both western and Asian Theravadins contributed to an atmosphere of crisis around his supposed apostasy and made the co-existence of the Wat's 'parallel congregations' difficult to sustain. The issues he raised brought into sharp relief fundamental differences between the givens of Theravadin Buddhism and the widespread view among western practitioners that Buddhism was inherently progressive and offered a range of possibilities in associational principles. Phra Khantipalo disrobed and a Theravadin faction came together and imposed a new constitution in 1992. It rewrote history and stipulated that WBD had always been – and must ever remain – an orthodox Thai-style Theravadin monastery. True to monastic hierarchical assumptions, the new constitution vested all power exclusively in five self-selected trustees who held office until death or resignation, after which the surviving trustees alone would choose the replacements. A Laotian-born, Thai-trained monk was appointed 'interim abbot' and is still in office 18 years later.

It was one thing to assert Theravadin monasticism, but quite another to make a monastery work in the middle of the Australian wilderness. As a visiting senior monk from England, Ajahn Viradhammo, pointed out in 1994, no Theravadin monastery could survive there and recommended that WBD should operate instead as a 'lay-based retreat centre' with hermitage facilities for visiting monastics. The new trustees followed this advice and a fragile compromise was restored. Under the de facto management of a lay committee, WBD returned to its former role as a busy and eclectic retreat centre for the next 10 years. Periodic eruptions occurred when orthodox Theravadin monks came on extended retreats and tried to assert their authority and gender exclusions, but the committee learned to dissuade their visits. Much more importantly, the centre hosted the major lay insight retreats in the Sydney area, ones often led by overseas or interstate teachers and in the Sydney region it acted as the spiritual home of lay insight practitioners outside the Goenka and Mahasi traditions. Once again, women played prominent roles in its spiritual life.

WBD had become a de facto voluntary association, but the trustees refused to negotiate any constitutional changes that would have seen their power diluted or the possibility of a future turn to Theravadin monasticism compromised. This institutional incongruity eventually doomed the compromise. From 2000 a series of interventions by the trustees (who had turned directors on WBD's incorporation in 1998) into the management of WBD led to increasingly severe conflicts that eroded the lay support base, so undermining WBD's ability to mount retreats and even maintain its buildings and land. In early 2005 the directors responded with a new attempt to turn WBD into a Theravadin monastery in practice, including reduced retreat activity and the enforcement of the vinaya (traditional rules) on the monastic facilities, which essentially banished women to separate facilities yet to be built.

Lay insight practitioners and other progressive lay supporters thereupon abandoned the centre. A dozen lay teachers, all members of the recently formed Insight Teachers' Circle of Australia (ITCA), published a statement on the insight community website, saying that they could no longer teach at WBD, given the gender implications of the change and the democratic deficit it revealed. The affair brought home to many insight practitioners for the first time both the incongruities in their communion with the Theravadin institutions that had trained so many of their teachers and the inescapable organizational requirements of lay insight practice.

This conflict over basic moral values suddenly left lay insight practitioners around Sydney without their accustomed institutional base and retreat centre.[3] A few months later they found themselves alienated from their most important inner urban base as well, the Buddhist Library and Meditation Centre, also because of the incongruity between de facto status as a voluntary association, on the one hand, and an authoritarian power structure, on the other.

It too, had been a lively, well-resourced meeting place for Asian and western Buddhists, although here as well (to refer back to Numrich) intersection tended to occur without interaction. Nonetheless, the library had the physical capacity to host its many large gatherings and introductory courses on meditation and Buddhism, as well as the weekly sittings of several dharma groups, including insight groups. Several of Sydney's insight teachers taught there for a number of years and wrote for its quality newsletter, *Dharma Vision*. But its governance structure operated as essentially that of a private business with little transparency, under the direction of its largest benefactor. In mid-2005, the latter imposed an autocratic management style; the Buddhist Library thereupon came to exemplify the widespread commodification of the dharma that Carrette and King analyse (2005). Feeling intimidated and demoralized, the entire staff of five resigned together in September 2005. At the same time, the lay insight teachers decided they could no longer justify working with an institution that showed so little respect for people, and their sitting groups left with them. Although the problem here was quasi-corporate rather than monastic authoritarianism, the refusal of normal civic associational principles produced the same result of disrupting the pattern of 'parallel congregations'.

In the wake of these two crises in 2005, the institutional bases left to a large number of practitioners (not least those in Sydney) were sparse. However, the one that already existed grew rapidly and new ones soon began to emerge. In 2000 a small suburban insight group, the Bluegum Sangha, had begun, and has experienced exponential growth since 2005, with several long-term practitioners taking up teaching roles in it. In 2004 the ITCA was formed and with its current membership of 16 insight meditation teachers from Sydney, Brisbane, the Northern Rivers, Perth, Adelaide, Alice Springs and Cairns (including the former Phra Khantipalo, now Laurence Khantipalo), it is the largest group of lay Buddhist teachers in Australia.

But in Sydney the big issue was how to replace WBD as the main insight retreat centre, especially in its role of inviting in visiting teachers. Out of a series of

crisis meetings of WBD activists in 2005, a new organization – Sydney Insight Meditators (SIM) – arose to take over its organizational services to the insight tradition. In other words, it aimed to invite local, interstate and overseas teachers to give talks and lead retreats and workshops around Sydney on a sustainable scale. The institutional lessons of the WBD crisis were foremost in the founders' minds: their documents insist on gender inclusiveness, progressive modern values (including ones appropriate to democratic associational life) and a secular orientation. For these purposes, the organization's founders undertook the discipline of an incorporated voluntary association under New South Wales legislation.

In an implicit tribute to 'global Buddhism', SIM also consciously followed the precedent of the Santa Fe Vipassana Sangha in not tying itself to any particular teacher, group of teachers or approach to practice. It acts as an umbrella organization for a number of lay insight sanghas in Sydney, starting with the Bluegum Sangha; but now for three further groups – the Tortoise Mountain, Golden Wattle and Beaches sanghas. At the time of writing, its retreat and course offerings have, in size and frequency, effectively replaced WBD's earlier contribution to insight practice.

Rethinking doctrine, reworking practice

The implications of that watershed year, 2005, speak to two important aspects of newly emerging variants of dharma practice. One concerns the nature and sources of spiritual authority; by moving away from the traditional institutional authority structures of the Theravada, the question arises as to what dharmic texts should be regarded as authoritative. The Bluegum Sangha's response has been to distance itself from the commentarial tradition and institute a sutra study program. An important shift in emphasis in the latter was a teaching tour by Stephen and Martine Batchelor in late 2004 and the former's critical view of the Theravadin commentarial tradition and approaches to insight meditation based on it – as against the Buddha's own teaching in the Pali canon. An important source of Batchelor's scepticism is Nanavira Thera's mid-twentieth-century underground classic, *Clearing the Path* (1987). That author puts the matter bluntly: having nominated the very few Pali sources – including the *nikayas* (themed collections of sutras) – that can claim authenticity, he adds: '[N]o other Pali books whatsoever should be taken as authoritative; and ignorance of them (and particularly of the traditional Commentaries) may be counted a positive advantage, as leaving less to be unlearned' (Nanavira 1987: 5).

The Bluegum Sangha chose as its first textbooks the first sutra-based biography, *The Life of the Buddha*, by Nanavira's close friend, Nanamoli (1972). To their surprise, some long-time insight students have found themselves not simply learning the art of reading sutras, but also acquainting themselves with a radically different sense of the founder himself.

Religious Buddhism has tended to ignore hermeneutic questions and has treated the Buddha's teachings as the timeless revelations of a transcendent being wholly removed from any earthly historical context. In this way, they follow another

general pattern: institutionalized religions' focus on 'privileged religious objects', in Batchelor's phrase, and the decontextualized 'Lord' Buddha have filled the bill as an object of both religious veneration and of 'authoritative' (orthodox) interpretation in the commentaries. Inevitably, much of that interpretation tends to be self-serving, in shoring up the claims to authority of the institutions producing it, their formulaic meditative techniques and their own associational shibboleths – most spectacularly the concentration of power and the marginalization of women, as noted earlier.

Modern approaches to interpretation have headed off in the opposite direction: they seek to situate the source of original teachings as precisely as possible in an historical and biographical context. This approach accepts that all spiritual traditions are human artefacts and the human founders, like all members of their species, are children of their time and culture. The relevant context thus not only specifies a time and place, but also a cultural framework (including religious culture) and the political and socioeconomic dynamics that would have shaped the individual in question. All these factors inform our reading of their words and deeds and give the student a new purchase on the words on the page and the practice they inform.

In spite of his pioneering the presentation of the Buddha as a concrete, historical figure, Nanamoli wrote as an orthodox Theravadin monk; in fact, he also translated (among much else) the commentary that defines the Theravadin orthodoxy, Buddhaghosa's *The Path of Purification*. More recent contributors to the work of unearthing the historical Buddha have worked from quite different starting points and have strongly influenced dharma study in Australian insight circles. For instance, Mishra's work, *An End to Suffering: The Buddha in the World*, starts with his surprise at finding that the Buddha was not an avatar of the god Vishnu, born from the mouth of Brahma, as his Hindu upbringing had claimed, but rather his most influential compatriot and a great contributor to the Indian intellectual tradition (2004).

A similar account of the Buddha's life and work emerges from Batchelor's series of eight hour-long dharma talks in 2005, 'The Life and Death of Siddhattha Gotama' and his *Living with the Devil: A Meditation on Good and Evil* (Batchelor, 2004). These sources, too, have had an impact on Australian insight circles. Batchelor's work brings a modern sceptical emphasis to encountering Buddhism, with an emphasis on Socratic questioning and an interest in actualizing the teachings through paying close attention to the Buddha's engagement with the world, including his confronting the difficulties and dilemmas of a human being living in unruly times.

To study 'the word of the Buddha' is a hermeneutically fraught process, but to engage in a critical approach is not only to get a more vivid sense of what the teachings might have meant, but also to gain a sense of how power plays a pivotal role in established institutions. Power fosters not only doctrinal distortions, apocrypha and prejudices, but it also shapes the very institutions of religious Buddhism themselves. At least in Sydney, recent institutional crises have forced insight practitioners to recognize and unpick the power issues nestling in venerable

institutions and, in this way, they have triggered the development of an intellectually vibrant spiritual community.

This exploration has also had an impact on approaches to meditation in Australia. The commentarial tradition (including the Abhidharma) has moulded the widely disseminated, formulaic techniques of vipassana practice, such as the Goenka and Mahasi methods. A critical approach to the commentaries naturally inspires scepticism towards the techniques based on them and calls for more creative approaches to applying the original 'word of the Buddha', not least the foundational text for insight meditators, the *Satipatthana Sutra*.

Many Australian insight practitioners have thus welcomed American teacher Jason Siff's annual retreats in several centres since 2005. Another critic of the commentarial tradition and the formulaic techniques it has spawned, he recommends (in an echo of Nanavira's words quoted earlier) 'unlearning' them in favour of a more direct and 'allowing' cultivation of awareness. Another American insight teacher, Gregory Kramer, has also established his influence, visits annually and advocates fresh approaches to insight practice – 'insight dialogue' and 'dharma dialogue' – based directly on the sutras.

Receptivity to new winds like these illustrates the strengths of secular insight practice in Australia, thanks to its diversity and open architecture (to borrow an expression from the information technology world). The move away from monastic traditions reflects the spiritual plurality of secular western society, which militates against vested institutional interests and the orthodoxies that promote their claims. Like its counterparts overseas, once it has established its own institutional settings, the secular insight movement in Australia has had little difficulty melding the Buddha's original ethical and spiritual undertakings with modern moral and associational principles. Indeed, the latter can appear as no more than a further specification of the Buddha's own approach to communal issues. Nevertheless, the gulf between modern values and associational requirements, on the one hand, and their monastic counterparts, on the other, seems unbridgeable.

Conclusion

Given the strength of the international influences on the development of secular insight meditation practice in Australia, it has, in many ways, replicated its development elsewhere, especially in Britain and America. A peculiar aspect of the Australian development, however, has been the long and problematic attempt to work with monastic institutions and at least one other major institution operating with a comparable autocratic power structure. That attempt grew out of Australia's high proportion of Buddhist migrants and groping ad hocery in the search for appropriate associational forms.

The accommodation worked for a time, but at a rising cost in the form of conflicts to assert basic modern moral priorities such as gender inclusiveness and equality and a democratic associational life. The conflicts revolved around the concentration versus the dispersal of power, and these power issues ultimately ruled out continued accommodation. Sydney-based practitioners in particular have

learned a strong lesson in just how important the principles of association underpinning their spiritual life and practice really are.

Although these points are now reasonably clear in the rear-vision mirror, there can be no sense in which Australian lay insight meditators and their organizations have reached some sort of terminus after a period of pioneering transition. On the contrary, there is every reason to regard existing arrangements as intractably tentative, even if they are a little less naive and makeshift than they were two decades earlier. But then again, as human beings we live and breathe 'contingency' in the dependent arising of events and conditions, which have given rise to the unique unfolding of Buddhist institutions 'down under'.

Notes

1 In particular, we need to exercise care around Baumann's use of the terms 'traditional' in this context, for it implies that the Buddhism of the other stages is non-traditional – a usage that suggests that a tradition is necessarily something hidebound. Many of the innovations we deal with in this chapter are traditional in a perhaps more useful sense, one derived from MacIntyre (1985). He conceptualizes a living (as opposed to a dead) tradition as an intergenerational 'conversation' whose participants remain aware of the tradition's original, generative questions and how questions and answers have evolved from the beginning. In this sense, many of today's Buddhist innovators – especially in their enthusiasm for retrieving the original canon – are more 'traditional' than their conservative critics.
2 This term is used in contrast to moral beliefs and reflects the authors' suspicion of moral relativism, based on the view that morality should be an efficient guide to conduct in the pursuit of the dharma.
3 In expressing the moral conflict in this way, we adopt the widespread assumptions of contemporary of moral philosophy, that moral knowledge needs to be contextualized in a particular culture and time and that moral sensitivity develops over time: see, for instance, Taylor (1989: introduction). While Buddhists as such adopt the original precepts, we need to avoid essentializing Buddhist morality as if it were something exhaustively expressed in those precepts and thus treating later moral specifications as optional extras, as inessential 'value preferences'.

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2 Soto Zen in Australia

Tradition, challenges and innovations[1]

Leesa S. Davis

> Establishing Buddhism in a new country is like holding a plant to a stone and waiting for it to take root.
>
> Shunryu Suzuki Roshi (Chadwick 1999: 252)

Soto Zen Buddhism came to Japan almost eight centuries ago, when the Buddhist monk, Eihei Dogen, returned from China to teach in his native land. In the late 1990s, in a radically different historical and cultural context, a Zen monk moved permanently to Melbourne and began to develop a Soto Zen teaching program. Soto Zen Buddhist teachers had visited Australia and began Zen groups before[2] but Ekai Korematsu, known to his students as Ekai-osho, is the first resident Zen monk to teach purely in the Soto tradition. The Zen community that he founded, Jikishoan,[3] has recently celebrated its tenth anniversary and has enjoyed a steady evolution over the years from a handful of dedicated practitioners to a small but thriving community based on spiritual and administrative structures established in thirteenth-century Japan by the Soto School 'founder', Eihei Dogen.[4]

The 10-year development of the Jikishoan Zen Buddhist Community offers fertile ground for the study of the adaptations, challenges and innovations involved in transplanting Buddhist practices and organizational structures to an Australian cultural setting as 'it is an opportunity to study the acculturation of a tradition as it is actually occurring.' (Gregory 2001: 233) For the purposes of this discussion, the organizational and spiritual aims of Jikishoan are especially interesting because Ekai Korematsu's teaching emphasizes traditional ways and adherence to traditional forms, which in the Soto Zen context means attempting to fit a monastic practice to a primarily lay community. This is not always an 'easy fit' but the problems and successes of this 'transplantation' process offer a window into the cultural shifts and clashes that organizations undergo and individuals experience.

This chapter is based on three years of participant observation fieldwork with Jikishoan (and to a lesser degree, other Australian Zen groups),[5] community (sangha) publications, personal interviews with Ekai Korematsu-osho and Zen practitioners and Ekai-osho's talks given both on retreats and to the general public. In this chapter, by way of a case study, I will begin to explore some of the issues that these adaptations and challenges to traditional Zen practice in the Australian context raises with the aim of working towards some understanding

of the development and characteristics of Soto Zen Buddhism in Australia at an organizational and individual level. To get more of a nuanced sense of the cultural shifts and clashes involved, my discussion will include 'the view from the cushion' in the form of experiential data from practitioner interviews and reports.

To this end, the chapter proceeds in three stages:

1. Ekai Korematsu's biography is briefly recounted and the evolution of the Jikishoan community is outlined with emphasis on the implementation of Japanese structures.
2. The challenges of a monastic structure to lay practitioners are investigated through practitioner reports and interviews.
3. Adaptations and innovations in the Australian context are noted.

Where appropriate, aspects of Jikishoan's history and development are compared and contrasted with other western Zen groups, both in Australia and overseas.

The chapter concludes by attempting to isolate some defining characteristics of Soto Zen Buddhism in Australia and questioning if there are, as yet, any significant differences between Zen in Australia and other western branches of Zen.

'Out of nowhere': the evolution of a Soto religious community

Ekai Korematsu (b. 1948) has an interesting 'cross-cultural' background to Zen practice as, although born and raised in Japan, he began Zen practice in the United States at the San Francisco Zen Centre with the intention 'to practise in the United States, in California, to establish some kind of practice community' (personal communication 1999). Having no family temple to inherit, as is the custom for temple priests in Japan, Ekai Korematsu comes to Soto Zen as an 'outsider' in the sense that he has had to build a Zen community without the immediate recognition and financial support of the Soto *Zenshu* in Japan. The necessity of earning an independent living coupled with the need to become officially affiliated with Soto Zen headquarters in Japan impacts on Jikishoan's organizational strategies, in the sense that there is a drive to conform to Soto 'orthodoxy' and, from the students' point of view, there is a sense of obligation to help financially support the teacher and his family (Jikishoan was officially affiliated with the Soto Zen School in Japan in 2001).

In the mid-1980s, after training in temples in Japan and two lengthy periods at one of the Soto head temples, Eihei-ji, Ekai-osho received dharma transmission from his teacher, Ikko Narasaki Roshi. As per his stated intentions, he returned to the United States and was beginning a Zen practice group in Oakland, California, while also practising at the San Francisco Zen Centre. At his teacher's request, he then returned to Japan, to help convert Narasaki Roshi's 'second' temple, Shogoji, into an international training monastery. In all, Ekai Korematsu spent over seven years at Shogoji, three years preparing the monastery and helping to train the first visiting American monk[6] and then a further four years working to fully establish the training centre.

Ekai-osho reports that he was a little hesitant to return to Japan after beginning to establish a practice community in the United States because with American practitioners he had seen other possibilities of 'opening up the path.' He reports that:

> Like a birch tree whose branches go this way and that way, my ideas were fluid and developing so the thought of going back to that rigid training system was difficult! I knew that I had to be prepared to become a Bonsai, [laughing] a Bonsai tree with all my branches cut down and my roots confined to the shape my master wanted.
>
> (Korematsu 2000: 2)

The rigidity of the Zen training structures in Japan and the necessity of catering to the many ritual and social obligations that parishioners (*danka*) bring have prompted similar responses from other Soto monks in the west. The most famous, and arguably the most successful Soto monk to establish a Zen centre in the west, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, founder of the San Francisco Zen Centre, expressed similar views when he began meditation sessions for non-Japanese and was impressed by their 'beginner's mind' – where the possibility of a purer Zen practice lay (Suzuki 1984: 21).[7] In her study of Zen in Brazil, Rocha reports that Soto monk Daigyo Moriyama Roshi, former abbot of Busshinji in Sao Paulo, was also inspired by the possibilities of a group of practitioners with 'beginner's mind'. In an interview Moriyama Roshi states: 'That is why I put my energy into a foreign country; here [in Brazil] Zen Buddhism can be created again in a purer way' (Rocha 2000: 40).

This is not to say that western practitioners come to Zen practice unencumbered by preconceived notions. In the case of an Asian teacher leading a convert community such as Jikishoan, there were early perceptions among the sangha that the teacher's ethnicity made Jikishoan more 'authentic' with some practitioners saying that they 'couldn't practice with a western teacher' (personal communication 2000). Conversely, some practitioners who had experience with other teachers in the United States or Japan were initially disappointed: 'Yes, he was Japanese, but where was the discipline? Where [was] the severity? He did the chants all wrong' (Bolton 2002: 5). In some cases, this disappointment led people to leave Jikishoan but, as was often noted, Jikishoan was the only Zen centre in Melbourne with a resident teacher, thus, for the most part, the students interested in a long-term commitment stayed on.

In 1998 Ekai Korematsu moved permanently to Melbourne from Japan with his Australian wife. In April 1998 he created the first of the 'garage zendos' a Zen practice place in the garage of his suburban home. Ten years on, in 2009, Jikishoan has 139 members and 50 friends with a mailing list of over 500 names. Aside from the regular teaching programs, Jikishoan holds three seven-day retreats (*sesshin*) per year, and regular one-day meditation workshops. Four lay-ordained students (three women, one man) are now authorized to teach and they conduct the orientation, deepening and workshop programs. Also in 2009 a charter branch (*bun-in*) was incorporated in Canberra. Jikishoan's activities are now carried out in Melbourne, Canberra and rural Ballarat.[8] Despite having no permanent centre

(indeed Jikishoan conducts its activities at six different venues in two states), the group's activities have continued to attract interest and have developed into a comprehensive Zen teaching program.

Following Ekai-osho's intention to develop an organization founded on community practice, the first Jikishoan committee was formed in 1999 consisting of eight members with administrative and practice responsibilities: president/*docho* (teacher); vice-president/*ino* (practice coordinator); treasurer (*fusu*); secretary (*jikoku*); *tenzo* (head cook); *shissui* (building manager); *kansu* (Ballarat coordinator); and *koho* (publications). The committee positions were based on the traditional Soto monastic organizational structures and, as more students became members, these positions developed into the *ryo* groups.[9]

The *ryo* structure is closely connected with Dogen's 'model for engaging the way' (*bendoho*). This approach is outlined by Dogen in his *Eihei-shingi* (Pure Standards for Eiheiji Monastery), a collection of six essays that gives detailed instructions for the daily conduct and attitude of monks living a disciplined monastic spiritual life.[10] In 2009 Jikishoan has 11 *ryo* groups – referred to as 'the body of Zen practice' – that are responsible for running and maintaining every aspect of the groups' spiritual and administrative functions.[11] Each *ryo* leader is responsible for keeping detailed records of the groups' activities and assets and gives regular reports to the committee. In the spirit of community practice, members are encouraged to join *ryo* groups as 'becoming involved in the day to day practicalities of ryo practice gives rise to a special kind of intimacy, with the community, with the teachings and ultimately with your self' (Jikishoan 2009).

In Jikishoan's development, as the *ryo* organizational structures have become more stable, the teaching has increasingly emphasized a monastic orientation with a core group of lay-ordained practitioners at the centre of the sangha. The wearing of robes – given by the teacher – has also become standard for more senior members. A hierarchical leadership structure has been developed where, for example, access to the teacher is no longer direct but takes place through a *ryo* group leader.

Emphasis on *ryo* practice in a lay context is a defining feature of Jikishoan's organizational structures. Its singularity hinging on two interrelated organizational issues: the problem of no permanent base and the need to be affiliated with the Soto School in Japan. Having no permanent practice/residential location requires clear and precise organizational strategies and structures and *ryo* practice provides this, while the need for official recognition necessitates an adherence to orthodoxy and the implementation of *ryo* monastic structures demonstrates this.

The weight of the robe: challenges of a monastic practice structure to lay practitioners

Ekai Korematsu emphasizes that the basic form of Soto practice should be well established before any adaptations are made – the practice foundation needs to be solid: 'Cultural differences are so great and if the practice forms are adapted to other cultures too quickly, without being properly digested then those adaptations

won't work and practice doesn't shift in appropriate ways' (Korematsu 2000). Here Ekai-osho's organic metaphor is analogous to the analysis of anthropologist, Milton Singer, in which a host culture ingests foreign cultural bodies, segregates them, breaks them down into useable forms and eventually builds them into 'cultural protoplasm' (Bell, 2000: 3). In effect, Ekai-osho is asking his students to 'swallow the system whole' (Bell 2000: 4) and then, once it is 'properly digested' appropriate adaptations and innovations will evolve. In this he is in agreement with Soto teacher Shohaku Okumura, who stresses the importance of establishing the foundational forms before any adaptations can be made: 'to create some American forms for American people practicing Soto Zen, Japanese forms are the only foundation on which American forms can be developed' (Okumura 1999).

In Soto Zen practice, both in Australia and the United States, the forum for establishing a solid practice foundation are retreats (*sesshin*) or the longer 'practice periods' where zazen is practiced intensely and the application of a monastic structure needs very little adaptation – indeed, according to Ekai Korematsu: '[R]etreat is the forum in which monastic qualities are translated into the lay context. Anyone who participates in a retreat gets a feel for it just by being there. There isn't anything you have to do.' In this context, he goes on to say that community practice needs to be established 'slowly' and that the 'essential practice anchor' is zazen (Korematsu 2006: 5).

In an example of how these 'effects' are 'translated' into the day-to-day running of the retreat and, by extension, the day-to-day administration of the community via *ryo* practice, a founding member observes that, in a retreat context, the *ryo* organizational arrangements with their 'attention to detail and the focus on doing a task with care and humility' provides a 'perfect example of how to construct a truly effective organizational structure' and goes on to add that, 'in all my 30 plus years of work in large and "well run" organizations, nothing ever came close to the beauty of the *ryo* arrangements when they were working well' (personal communication 2009).

Moreover, according to this practitioner, the monastic *ryo* practices are 'predicated upon top-down lines of authority and control supported by detailed documentation on policies, procedures and practices' (personal communication 2009). A system like that assumes that the required numbers of workers (i.e., monks) are available. In a lay setting with a dispersed sangha, this places a lot of pressure on a small number of students. All *ryo* tasks have to be coordinated between the *ryo* leader and its members. If members are not available, the 'top-down lines of authority' means that the task falls on the *ryo* leader. This has led to some practitioners having large *ryo* workloads and has placed them under considerable pressure as they are also juggling work and family demands.

Jikishoan members report that *ryo* work 'could be anything from a few hours a week to as much as a day per week' (personal communication 2009). This amount of time in addition to regular *sanzenkai*, practice meetings, committee meetings and retreats has often led to tensions between the student and their families and/or partners. These personal tensions are particularly difficult to overcome if the student's partner does not share an interest in spiritual practice. In some cases, the

tensions have resulted in temporary or complete separations. The type of commitments that belonging to a spiritual organization engenders and demands are often difficult for 'outsiders' to understand as ' monks in a monastery are obligated to undertake *ryo* work tasks whereas Jikishoan members work on a volunteer basis motivated by personal commitment to their spiritual practice or their personal commitment to supporting the teacher' (personal communication 2009).

In lay spiritual practice, accepting the policies, procedures and practices of a monastic structure also implies submission to authority: not only the authority of the teacher but also of the *ryo* leaders. A long-term Jikishoan practitioner reports that this authority was sometimes abused and there were 'instances of bullying in the *ryo* groups' (personal communication 2009) but for the most part challenges and problems centred around the fact that the volunteer nature of the work meant that if it became too much practitioners could discontinue their involvement. In this context, a *ryo* leader observes that: 'unlike monks in a monastery, the *ryo* members were not necessarily prepared to accept prescriptive tasks and top-down requirements' and further comments that 'the Australian character, being sceptical of authoritarian rule, meant that it was hard to find members who were fully committed to the meticulous record keeping and detailed practice' (personal communication 2009).

Two common western perceptions of Zen practice are that it is anti-authoritarian – 'outside of words and scriptures' – and solely based on meditation practice – 'a direct pointing'.[12] However, Soto Zen practice, at least in an environment that aims to adhere to traditional ways, is structured on hierarchical authoritarian principles and, although meditation (zazen) is the heart of the practice, being a practising Buddhist cannot be reduced to simply being a 'meditator'. These preconceptions are thrown into sharp relief in Jikishoan's case for two main reasons. First, they are trying to establish a temple with all the accompanying infrastructure 'from the ground up' and practitioners are required to submit to a 'top-down' structure of authority and to contribute time, skills and labour to this effort; and, second, there is the Soto emphasis on the 'practice attitude' or 'zazen-mind' that should infuse all daily activities in a monastery and, by extension, every aspect of lay life.

This emphasis is specifically tailored to a monastic setting where there are no outside 'distractions.' The idea that every action and activity constitutes spiritual practice is not so easily maintained in a lay setting and it is perhaps one of the biggest 'sticking points' that this group of practitioners have experienced. In his study of Rinzai Zen in America, Hori notes that American Zen students also have difficulty in 'conceptualizing their everyday activities and social relations as applications of the central teachings' (1998: 63) as the intensity and structures of retreat practice are not carried over to daily life and they cannot easily extend their ideas of practice into more 'mundane' activities (Hori 1998: 64–5). In Jikishoan's case, the main difficulties centre around the volunteer nature of the work and what students perceive as a blurring of meditation practice and administrative work in which administrative work is almost given preference. Put simply, emotional tensions arise when students feel that they are putting more time into administration and not 'practising' i.e., meditating enough. Students describe this feeling

as 'distressing' and on being told by the teacher that this 'was not a problem' since 'it was the time commitment that was most important' report feeling 'confused' (personal communication 2009).

Feelings of confusion over 'what Zen practice actually was' coupled with the demands of large *ryo* workloads led to some 'people feeling overworked and underpracticed' (personal communication 2000). These 'widespread feelings of overwork and resentment' (personal communication 2009) were compounded by such problems being described as 'a personal practice issue' (personal communication 2009). This blurring of the boundaries between meditation practice and work practice is 'in line' with practice and daily life being 'one' but it served to place the responsibility for resolving difficult practical organizational problems back on the shoulders of the student: 'What did it mean to have a practice issue? The student was left with a sense of inadequacy. What was the solution? To practise even more!' (personal communication 2009). One student describes this as a 'catch-22 situation' that led to feeling 'constant pressure to be doing even more practice, i.e., more *ryo* work' (personal communication 2009).

The 'catch-22' dilemma is triggered by a perception of meditation as 'real' practice and administrative work as a supportive kind of practice, but ultimately secondary. In her study of Diamond Sangha Zen groups in Australia, Spuler notes a similar perception among students. Diamond Sangha groups have a two-tiered structure consisting of an administrative council or board and a dharma group to support the teacher and deal with practice matters. Spuler observes that 'the difference between administration and practice is difficult to define' and quotes one student referring to tensions that arose between those two groups, 'because one group was doing all the organization and the other group was doing all the teaching. It got to be a bit like those of the spiritual people up there and these are the mundane people down here' (Spuler 2003: 68).

In Jikishoan's case, the spiritual/mundane dilemma[13] has led to the development of a system whereby 'volunteer hours' and 'practice hours' are separately tallied to give students the opportunity to 'strike a balance'. To my knowledge, this is an original move, all the more interesting because it acknowledges that volunteer/administrative work and meditation are spiritually different – perhaps if only in degree. Also it is an important 'policy' change in direct response to student difficulties. This innovative move is now described in more detail.

Taking root in different soil: adaptations and innovations

In Jikishoan's 10-year history, practice and administrative structures have steadily evolved, for the most part without too many striking adaptations. In an organizational sense, the Soto *ryo* structure adapts very well to western committee structures and, in a practice sense, Ekai Korematsu generally adheres to traditional forms and procedures, albeit with some tolerance and patience for his 'young' lay sangha. (It should be noted that he is also a 'newcomer' to Australia and is personally adapting to Australian culture.) However, attention can be drawn to some relevant issues in Jikishoan's particular case and in the broader Australian context.

The lack of a permanent base means that Jikishoan often needs to use facilities belonging to other organizations and thus needs to interact with other Buddhist and community groups. Indeed, the plurality of Buddhist traditions in Australia that places different Buddhist groups in reasonable proximity to one another means that Buddhists of various traditions have become neighbours (a feature common to western settings but a rarity in Asia – Baumann 2001: 2) and this has benefited Jikishoan. Over the years, the community has forged connections with other organizations including 'two Tibetan Buddhists groups; a Vietnamese Buddhist group; a shiatsu training college and a yoga centre' (Hutchison 2004: 28). These links have opened up teaching possibilities for Ekai Korematsu and have brought new members to the group.

In common with many Zen groups in the west, Jikishoan has taken steps to promote a more socially engaged Buddhism via an outreach Buddhist chaplaincy program in prisons and through Ekai-osho teaching Zen meditation in a drug rehabilitation centre in Melbourne. These initiatives are still in the early stages and are inspired by the various outreach programs of Zen centres in the United States and Australia such as the San Francisco Zen Center's programs in prisons and for the homeless (San Francisco Zen Center 2009) New York-based Tetsugen Bernard Glassman's socially engaged Zen Peacemaker Order (Zen Peacemakers 2009) and Diamond Sangha Buddhist Peace Fellowship initiatives (Sydney Zen Centre 2009) Jikishoan students generally see such work as the natural extension of Buddhist ideas of compassion, service and the Mahayana Bodhisattva ideal.

The problem of blurring meditation practice and administrative work and the difficulties that students have experienced with this has brought about perhaps the most interesting innovation to Jikishoan's operating structure. At the eleventh AGM in 2009, the secretary (*shoji ryo*) reported that a system had been put in place for members to separately record volunteer hours versus practice hours 'to encourage members to maintain a "healthy" balance between time spent in volunteer activities and time spent in practice' (*Jikishoan Annual Report* 2009: 13). As mentioned earlier, this is an original innovation prompted by genuine distress in the sangha. It is particularly interesting in the Soto context as it separates meditation practice and 'work' practice – a separation that Soto Zen aims to negate (both in philosophical and experiential terms). In effect, this innovation is a direct response to 'where the sangha is at' and, in terms of Jikishoan's development, it points to a certain confidence that foundational practice forms have been established enough to be able to implement adaptations. This move is a good illustration of Baumann's categorization of a group making an 'innovative self-development in response to challenges from the host culture' (Baumann 1994: 37).

As this is a relatively new move, the impact on students and the logistical success(es) are yet to be seen but, for the purposes of this discussion it circles back to the issues that instigated the move in the first place and serves to restate the fundamental Zen question: 'What is practice?' Does practice only take place on a cushion in the zendo? For example, would activities such as the outreach programs in prisons or working on Zen texts for publication in the newsletter be considered 'practice' hours or 'volunteer' hours? Or can time spent in a committee meeting be

clearly designated as volunteer hours given the dual practice/administration status of all the offices? Exactly how this innovation will evolve and impact on the group is an interesting aspect of a further study.

A final issue to consider is adaptations to Ekai Korematsu's teaching. Ekai-osho's teaching style is friendly and direct. In his discourse, he strives to stress that Zen is not so exotic but 'very concrete' and expresses Buddhist concepts and ideas in the Australian idiom: referring to the Bodhi tree as the 'no-worries'[14] tree and that Zen is not just a 'she'll be right'[15] attitude (Korematsu 2001). In retreat dharma talks (*teisho)*, he tells students that 'on the first and second days of retreat you may not feel so good with what I call retreat jet-lag' (Korematsu 1999) or alternatively, that 'the first three days of retreat are like a detox period' (Korematsu 2008: 6). At the end of retreats he asks each individual practitioner for a personal 'weather report' to gauge how they have responded to the practice (Korematsu 2001). These 'borrowings' from the specific host culture (Australian) and the broader host culture (western) illustrate Ekai-osho's attempts to frame teachings in terms that Australian students will readily understand and are also part of his personal acclimatization to Australian culture.

Although Ekai-osho will use Australian idiom to make a point, he generally adheres to the traditional Soto teaching strategy of offering commentary on teaching stories and dialogues (koan), but not advising students to work on them in meditation. This is in line with the Soto emphasis on *shikantaza* (just sitting) a physically precise yet objectiveless meditation practice made paradigmatic for the Soto School by Dogen. This approach is in marked contrast to Soto teacher, Hogen Yamahata, whose Open Way Zen in New South Wales is the only other Australian temple affiliated with Soto headquarters in Japan. Hogen-san (as he is known to his students) not only works on koan with students, but he also sometimes extends the parameters of traditional koan definition from the canonical cases of the masters to include elements taken from daily life. A common thread that runs through Hogen-san's formulating of koan is the idea of 'one's deepest life-question' and the instruction that student's should 'put [their] most important question into the sitting position' (Yamahata, 1998: 180). Buddhist scholar, Griffith Foulk, notes that this type of instruction is a feature of many western expressions of Zen:

> [T]he idea that 'anything can serve as a koan' is prominent in Western expressions of Zen (i.e., anything that becomes the sustained focus of an existential problem or 'life crisis' can be used as an 'insight riddle' or koan) [and is] a modern development [for which] there is scarcely any precedent for in the classical literature.
>
> (Foulk, 2000: 26)

Conclusion

In the 10-year development of Jikishoan, the community has successfully established and maintained a Soto religious identity with well-defined teaching programs and traditional organizational structures. The Australian environment has proved fertile ground for Ekai Korematsu's teaching style and spiritual aims. He has enjoyed support from experienced practitioners and attracted new students to the tradition of Soto Zen. The gradual implementation of orthodox practices and organizational structures has mirrored the growing commitment and maturity of the core members of the sangha. Adaptations to the Australian cultural setting have been instigated primarily by the need to address problems of shortage of labour, the volunteer nature of the work and practitioner disquiet concerning the need to balance meditation practice with volunteer or work practice.

Spuler notes that 'most of the Buddhist lineages found in Australia are also represented in America and Europe [and] indeed many Australian lineages have their headquarters in other Western countries [hence] it seems likely that the majority of characteristics would be shared by Australian Buddhism' (Spuler 2000: 39). Jikishoan has generally developed along similar lines and made similar adaptations as Zen in other western countries. In keeping with other Zen centres in the west, Jikishoan has diverged from traditional Japanese orientations by beginning to have women in teaching positions, by forging ecumenical links with other Buddhist and religious organizations[16] and by social engagement such as outreach programs in prisons and teaching in a drug rehabilitation centre, all of which have been mirrored in the transplantation and development of Zen in the United States and Europe.[17]

What is particular to the Australian situation are the demographics. Australia is a large country with a relatively small population hence, in comparison with the United States, there is a smaller pool of resources – in terms of student numbers and financial support – to draw from. For example, after 10 years the San Francisco Zen had established a Zen monastery at Tassajara and a city centre in San Francisco through student donations and corporate fundraising (Chadwick 1999: 266, 351). Jikishoan has a small building fund and after 10 years is still some time away from affording a permanent base. The demographics also have ramifications for students as, due to the fact of smaller student numbers, some challenges of developing a community practice are felt more intensely because of greater workloads on fewer people. Less opportunity for financial sponsorship also places more obligation on the sangha to contribute to the financial well-being of the teacher and the organization.

Baumann has identified the influence of German 'Protestant' values in the early transplantation of Buddhism in Germany (1994; 1997). In the culture contact between Japanese Buddhism and Australia perhaps there are some emerging signs of Australian values and character shaping the transplantation of Buddhism. A Jikishoan practitioner advances the idea that 'Australians are generally suspicious of authoritarian rule and prefer informal modes of social conduct and communication.' (It is perhaps too early to clearly identify what impact such 'values' might have, but as Australian students begin to teach such qualities and worldviews should have an impact.) All in all, the relationship between religion and culture is a complex dynamic that configures and reconfigures aspects of traditional religious forms into expressions that match local needs and interpretations. In Jikishoan's first 10 years there have been subtle indications of this living dynamic in action.

Notes

1 I would like to thank Ekai Korematsu-osho and the Jikishoan Zen Buddhist Community for their contribution to my research.
2 Most notably, Hogen Yamahata, founder of Open Way Zen. It must be mentioned here that the Soto *Zenshu* in Japan officially recognizes two Soto temples in Australia: Jikishoan in Melbourne and Hogen Yamahata's Dochu-An: Open Way Australia in Byron Bay, New South Wales. However Hogen-san spends only part of each year in Australia and the practice and administrative structure of Open Way is not as focused on traditional Soto monastic structures. For more information see Open Way Zen 2009.
3 Jikishoan translates as direct (*jiki*) realization (*sho*) hut (*an*).
4 The Soto School claims two founding patriarchs: Dogen Zenji (1200–1253) and the fourth ancestor in Dogen's line, Keizan-Zenji (1268–1325). Consequently, there are two head temples Eihei-ji, and Keizan-Zenji's Sojiji.
5 Over a three-year period I attended retreats, lectures and workshops and conducted interviews with teachers and members of Open Way Zen, the Clifton Hill Zendo and the Melbourne Zen Group.
6 The American monk, Nonin Chowaney, a student of Dainin Katagiri Roshi, was the first foreign monk to undertake training at Sogoji. He is now Abbot of the Nebraska Zen Centre.
7 'In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few' (Suzuki 1984: 21).
8 Ekai-osho also occasionally conducts one-day workshops with a small group of students at a zendo on the Mornington Peninsula approximately 85 km from Melbourne.
9 The term *ryo* refers to work spaces for various office holders and their staff. It can also refer to the staff of a certain position. Thus the term *tenzo ryo* refers to the kitchen workers. Since Jikishoan has no permanent base, *ryo* always has the latter meaning.
10 See Leighton and Okumura 1996.
11 The Jikishoan *ryo* groups range from the *fusu ryo* that is headed by the treasurer, to the *tenzo ryo* that coordinates all meals at community functions. For a full list of the 11 *ryos*, see Jikishoan 2009.
12 'Outside of words and letters' and 'a direct pointing' are Zen slogans attributed to the semi-legendary Bodhidharma. For examples of western perceptions of Zen, see Kapleau 1980: 222–3; Chadwick 1999: 171–2. In my experience with Jikishoan, a number of people did not return because they 'couldn't see the need for all the ritual' or felt that 'there was too much administration work'.
13 There is a classic Zen story that 'answers' the spiritual/mundane dichotomy:

> In the Kuan-yin Monastery the dharma ensign was once broken down by the wind. A monk came to [master] Chao-chou and asked, 'What will this magic ensign turn into, a divine or a mundane thing?' The Master answered, 'Neither mundane, nor divine.' The monk further pressed, 'What will it ultimately be?' The Master said, 'Well, it has just dropped to the ground.'
>
> (Chang 1969: 167)

14 'No worries' is a common Australian expression that usually means there are no difficulties involved in a certain task. It can also mean 'It's no trouble at all' or 'you're welcome'.
15 'She'll be right' is another common Australian expression that usually means 'everything will be ok'. It can also have a sarcastic or ironic meaning as a response to someone making a mistake or not caring about the result of an action.
16 See Chadwick 1999; Spuler 2003.
17 For examples of scholarly work on these adaptations, see Prebish 1999; Bell 2000; Kone 2001.

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3 Green Tara in Australia

Reassessing the relationship between gender, religion and power relations[1]

Ruth Fitzpatrick

This chapter focuses on what Green Tara means to a group of Australian women involved in Tibetan Buddhist practice. The research is based on data generated in four focus groups, involving 13 Australian women who regularly participated in Green Tara rituals. In conducting the focus groups, I aimed to understand what meanings the women attributed to Tara and how relevant gender and feminist concerns were in their relationship to her.

According to Tibetan Buddhist mythic history, Green Tara, the most popular female deity of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, made a vow to always incarnate in a female form, despite the prevailing assumption that being in a female body was an obstacle to gaining enlightenment: 'Since so many desire enlightenment in a man's body', Tara pronounced, 'until all suffering is ended, in all worlds, for all beings, in all universes, I shall work for the benefit of sentient beings in a woman's body.' Tara qualified her decision by saying: '[H]ere there is no woman, no man, no individual consciousness. Labelling male or female has no essence. Rather these are categories created by the confusion of worldly minds' (Taranatha 1981: 11–12).[2] This reflected the Tibetan Buddhist philosophical understanding that gender is ultimately an illusion, a product of dualistic thinking and, hence, only a relative truth. Though written thousands of years ago, in a geographic and cultural landscape far from Australia, Tara's story continues to have meaning and relevance in the lives of Australians in the twenty-first century.

Green Tara's story came to life for me in 1998, when I was first introduced to the practice of Tara while staying in Pemayangtse, a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Sikkim. Following the instructions given to me, I began visualizing myself as Tara, majestically hovering above the snow-capped peaks of Kachenjunga, the view from my room beside the monastery. I found compelling Tara's active and dynamic disposition, articulated in her iconographic form, with her right leg outstretched ready for action and her left leg drawn inward symbolizing meditative concentration. That Tara was both compassionately and energetically engaged in the world, while deeply meditative, articulated a way of being for my own life that harmonized what I had sometimes experienced as conflicting motivations: engagement with social change versus inward spiritual development. While Tara's activity and dynamism and her compassion and wisdom made her a highly

appealing model for my own identity, the fact that she was female was particularly significant to her appeal.

As my interest in Tara developed over several years, two themes continued to rouse my curiosity. I had become increasingly aware of the overriding rejection of religious traditions and religious icons by feminists. I thought Tara's characteristics and her vow in particular offered an interesting challenge to the secular and feminist notion that religious gendered identities were necessarily limiting to women. Given this stance, how would Green Tara, who overtly took a stand against the fallacy of a male form being superior for enlightenment, be critiqued? I was also interested in how other Australian women constructed Green Tara. Was her gender considered real or significant, given that gender in Buddhism is, ultimately, considered an illusion? To explore these questions further, I conducted focus groups with Australian women involved in Green Tara practices. I was interested in what characteristics emerged as significant in their construction of Green Tara, whether Tara's gender was relevant and how and whether Australian cultural themes, in particular feminism, impacted on their construction of Tara's meaning.

The changing nature of feminism and religion in Australia

The relationship between mainstream religions and feminism has been contentious at best (Hawthorne 2009: 136). Religious discourses and religious traditions have marginalized and subordinated women and have produced and legitimated misogyny in a multitude of ways (Hawthorne 2009: 134). Feminists have consequently strongly associated religion with the oppression of women. Particularly since second-wave feminism, which was at its height between the 1960s to the early 1980s, many feminists have considered religions as singularly oppressive and destructive to women (Woodhead 2003: 68–9). Influenced heavily by Marxist and socialist feminism, many second- wave Australian feminists regarded religion as hopelessly patriarchal and beyond redemption (Lindsay 2005: 32). Lindsay claims that this outright rejection of things religious by secular Australian feminists required that women jettison – or conceal their religious or spiritual inclinations if they wished to be regarded as true feminists (Lindsay 2005: 32). This blanket dismissal of religion and religious sensitivities obscured the productive role that religion was playing in some western women's lives, as well as the work that religiously inclined women were doing to reform religions and develop their own women-centred spirituality, often outside institutional confines (Woodhead 2003). Developing alongside but in antagonism to mainstream secular feminism, other forms of feminist-based resistance within religions were taking place. Despite the huge body of overseas literature that exists on feminist theology and spirituality, it remains a subject of minority interest in Australia (Lindsay 2005: 32). Although far fewer in number than in America and Europe, a steady stream of texts addressing mainly Christian feminist concerns have emerged since the 1970s (McPhillips 2000: 112). There are, however, few accounts of Australian women in non-Christian traditions (McPhillips 2000: 113).[3]

Since the height of second-wave feminism, significant theoretical changes have occurred in the understanding of gender and religion. Second-wave feminism developed a highly essentialist understanding of men and women and campaigned for the liberation of women from male oppression or 'patriarchy' (Woodhead 2003: 67). What is now known as third-wave feminism, challenges the notion that there is an essential category of experience that can be associated with all women and resists dichotomous notions of gender relations, wherein 'patriarchal' male oppressors have all the power and innocent female victims have none (Woodhead 2003: 67). Alongside various postmodern and postcolonial critiques, which highlight the significance of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and other factors, Foucault's reconceptualization of the nature of power has been pivotal in these changes (Woodhead 2007a: 567).

For Foucault, power is not something permanently possessed by some and not by others. When speaking of power, Foucault is primarily referring to relations of power (Fornet-Betancourt, Becker and Gomez-Muller 1988: 11). In focusing on power as something constantly moving and dynamic, Foucault shifts attention away from the grand, overall strategies of power to the way in which power works on the ground in the real-time interactions of people, which he calls the 'meticulous rituals' or 'micro-physics' of power (Hall 1997: 77).

In an extension of his understanding of the micro-physics of power, Foucault, in his later works, developed a theory about how certain techniques or practices of the self can enable a modification of power relations. These practices of the self he described as:

> [A] set of practices an individual performs upon him or herself, which permit individuals to affect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves.
>
> (Foucault 1988: 18)

According to this understanding, changes in power relations can be brought about through certain modifications to the self. O'Grady argues that, 'if the micro-level of life is ignored in the push for progressive social change, a range of power relations will remain intact' (2004: 98). In this light, modifications on the self can be seen as constituting political activity at the 'microphysical' level (Taylor and Vintges 2004: 7).

Sociological studies of gender and religion conducted in America have begun incorporating these more nuanced understandings of power (Kaufman 1991; Griffith 1997). These studies reveal that women weave new meanings into religious practices in varied, complex and highly specific ways, challenging the notion that religious symbols and practice are necessarily detrimental to women (Woodhead 2003: 70). Little work of this type has been conducted into religious practice in Australia.

In an effort to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between feminism and Australian women's reconstruction of Green Tara, I will incorporate Foucault's understanding of power into an analysis of data gained from focus

groups with Australian women involved in Green Tara practice. However, I begin by elaborating on what Tara practice or Tara rituals in Australia consist of. After providing a background to the participants and methods used in the study, I outline the major themes to have emerged in the focus groups. These were Tara's vow, her multiple and polar characteristics and her compassionate engagement with the world.

The way Tara is understood is affected by her Australian cultural setting. As such, the research reveals that culture plays a role in shaping the interpretation of religious doctrines and practices. Feminism in particular appears to have influenced how Tara is understood, regardless of the practitioners' orientation to feminism. This is evidenced by the significance of Tara's gender to the participants and how they identify with her to reconstruct the meaning of being female.[4] Through conducting the ritual practice, the women attempted to adopt Tara's qualities in a manner that modified themselves and their own subjectivities. Identifying with Tara enabled them to test the limits of womanhood that had been imposed on them. In doing so, their engagement with Tara can be likened to Foucault's techniques or practices of the self. The research consequently challenges the notion that religious practices are necessarily oppressive to women, arguing that a more nuanced approached to understanding the role of religious practices in social change is needed.

Tibetan Buddhism and Tara rituals in Australia

In order to garner a greater understanding of how women develop their relationship to Tara, in this section I provide some detail of the nature of Tara rituals and their place within Tibetan Buddhism. For all the participants in my research, Tara rituals were part of a broader practice and commitment to Tibetan Buddhism. All but one of the participants became involved in Tara practice through involvement with a Tibetan Buddhist centre in Australia. As such, the formation of Tibetan Buddhist centres in Australia has been the most significant factor in facilitating Tara's introduction to Australia. Many Tibetan Buddhist centres in Australia conduct Tara rituals regularly. Most Tibetan Buddhist centres in Australia are affiliated with one of the four main Tibetan Buddhist schools: Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya and Gelug. Several Sakya centres offer the practice daily and most Gelug centres conduct the ritual monthly.

A Tara ritual, commonly known as Tara practice, usually involves making various offerings to Tara and other deities, as well as chanting, visualization, meditation and dedicating the benefits of the ritual to the welfare of all sentient beings. The main aspect of the ritual is devoted to chanting the 'Twenty-One Praises to Tara'. The prayer is usually chanted in both Tibetan and English. Throughout the practice, Tara is visualized with light emanating from her body. Initially, practitioners visualize Tara in front of them. When the practitioner has received initiation by a qualified Tibetan Buddhist teacher, she is permitted to visualize herself as Green Tara in the centre of a circle (mandala) of 21 Taras (Simmer-Brown 2001: 150). Initiation or empowerment ceremonies for Tara are

regularly offered in Australia.[5] Sakya Tharpa Ling regularly offers Tara initiations, as does the Tibetan Buddhist Society (Gelug), both located in Sydney. Independent visiting Tibetan Buddhist teachers also offer initiations. The ceremony involves a variety of prayers, offerings and visualizations that provide the practitioner with the necessary empowerments to partake in the full practice of the deity. A large ceremony was held in 2009 in a prominent Sydney suburb town hall, conducted by Chimey Luding Rinpoche, a female Sakya Tibetan Buddhist teacher, and was attended by around 350 Australians.[6]

Another organization operating in Australia associated with Tara practices is called Tara Dhatu. Tara Dhatu conduct ritual dances in honour of Tara, combining Indian, Tibetan and western ritual traditions. Tara Dhatu has four groups operating in Australia (Sydney, Adelaide, Blue Mountains and Daylesford).

Focus groups

To gain a more detailed understanding of Australian women's relationship with Tara, in 2007 I conducted four focus groups with a total of 13 Australian women involved in Tara rituals throughout Sydney, Australia. All the research participants were of Anglo-Saxon Australian background, except one. All participants had undertaken tertiary education and three were either engaged in, or had completed, postgraduate studies. At the time of the interviews the average age of the women was 53, with an age range of 42 to 61. All the women involved in the research participated in Tara rituals.

The participants were recruited from four Buddhist organizations in Australia. The first focus group was conducted with members of the Tara Dhatu organization. The second focus group was conducted with practitioners from the Drogmi Retreat Centre of the Sakya tradition. The third focus group was conducted with members of the Vajrayana Institute, a branch of the Foundation for the Preservation Mahayana Tradition from the Gelug tradition. The final focus group was conducted with practitioners affiliated with the Kagyu tradition, who met in one of the practitioner's house devoted to ritual practice. All groups met monthly to conduct Green Tara rituals, except for Drogmi, who met weekly. Participants from all groups revealed that individually they conducted the practice more regularly, many aspiring to maintain the ritual daily. These rituals were conducted at home or parts thereof on trains on the way to work, in cars and before airplane trips.

The focus groups were conducted in a semi-structured way. A schedule of questions was designed, however, in the process of conducting the focus groups, I allowed discussion to unfold in its natural course, interjecting as rarely as possible. Questions included were 'is Tara's gender significant', 'what qualities about Tara appeal to you' and 'how does Tara impact upon your life?' The most significant themes to emerge in the focus groups were Tara's vow to incarnate as a woman, Tara's multiple and polar qualities and her compassionate engagement with the world.

Tara through Australian eyes: a dynamic and engaged woman

When I asked participants in the research whether Green Tara's gender or femaleness was important to them, all responded with a definitive yes. Diane, from Vajrayana Institute, said: 'Oh absolutely, she's a female Buddha.' Lisa, from the Sakya group, said: 'Absolutely.' Elise, from the Tara Dhatu group, responded to the question in a manner that indicated she thought the answer was completely obvious, saying, with emphasis, 'of course'.

Further emphasizing the significance of Tara's gender, Tara's vow to be female was retold or referred to in three out of the four focus groups. Sabrina from the Tara Dhatu group delighted in the fact that 'Tara chose to manifest in the female form'. With high-spirited body language and enthusiastically supported by other members of the focus group, Sabrina retells Tara's vow: 'By jeez, by golly, from here on till … I'll be in the female form.' She goes on to say, 'more and more the sacredness of women's lives isn't being honoured … you know we think it is, but it's not.' Sabrina felt that Tara's vow to be female could help bring about a greater respect for women.

Lisa, from the Sakya group, liked the fact that Tara 'bucked the system'. According to Lisa: 'When the monks said to Tara you'll never become enlightened as a woman, Tara says, "bull__! Yes I will, and I'll keep returning as a woman just to prove it".' Lisa relates Tara's 'bucking of the system' to her own formative years growing up in Australia. She says: '[W]e [the other focus group members] grew up in the era where it [power relations between men and women] was changing and you had to fight the system to help make it change.' For Diane, from the Gelug group, practising Tara was 'about drawing out more the feminine side in a culture that's very masculine focused'.

The data revealed that Tara's female gender was a significant characteristic for all the participants. This was amplified by the fact that she deliberately chose to be female, in conflict with the conventionally held assumption of the time that a male body was superior. The value of Tara being female was in part seen as a means for women and 'the feminine' to be honoured and recognized in society. For Elise, Tara was important because visualizing and contemplating 'images of enlightened women' was a powerful way to contrast those images, which put a 'slant on women'.

Although all the women affirmed the value of Tara's gender and the need for empowered female deities, the participants held mixed feelings about feminism. Less than half of the participants identified as feminists. Some saw feminism in a positive light and others in a neutral way. Joan, who did not consider herself a feminist said, 'I consider feminism to be a polarized view of life and don't let such views influence how I conduct my way of life.' Yet she was nonetheless inspired by Tara, as she was a powerful and strong woman.

Donna said that what she liked about Tara and eastern female deities is that they are 'strong … ferocious … attracting … and pacifying'. Donna went on to say that in her background, referring to Christianity and western culture, the depiction of woman was 'so divided and that was the beauty of discovering the eastern

way of looking at things … that it could all be united. I didn't have to push one [disposition] away to have another'. Through this multiplicity, Donna finds that Green Tara 'gives us [women] permission to empower and liberate ourselves' from limited female identities.

Another prominent theme to emerge in the focus groups, as evidenced in Donna's earlier statement, was the multiple and oft contradictory characteristics that Tara embodied. This was seen as something quite distinct to Tara and something they had not encountered in their own cultural symbols (Christian or secular). Tara's multiplicity was described in the main prayer used in Tara rituals, the 'Twenty-One Praises to Tara'. The prayer outlines the characteristics and activities of 21 Taras. Each verse in the praise is dedicated to a different Tara, although all Taras are considered to be emanations of the central Tara, Green Tara. One Tara, for example, embodies peaceful means. She is described as 'the blissful, virtuous, peaceful one, she who acts from within nirvana's serenity' (Philbedge 2003: 7). Another Tara is fiercely wrathful, she who vanquishes great fears and mighty devils, simply with 'a wrathful twist of her lotus face' (Philbedge 2003: 7).

In reference to Tara's multiplicity, Sabrina said that Tara's expression of 'all those different aspects' and 'seeing that … all those aspects are valid' creates a 'sense of strength', that offsets the 'hundreds of years … of what we've been told women are'. 'Honouring those diverse aspects', according to Sabrina, is a way of offsetting limited notions of womanhood. Sabrina's use of Tara to resist 'what we've been told women are' echoes Foucault's notion to 'refuse what we are' (Foucault 1982: 216; Simons 1995: 2) meaning that individuals should refuse to be tied to modes of being that others subject them to. The way in which Green Tara was used to alter participants' identities reflected what Foucault called 'new techniques or practices of the self'. Foucault describes practices of the self, as 'a treasury of devices, techniques, ideas and procedures' (Foucault 1984a: 349). Foucault regarded these practices as significant in modifying power relations. He paints the significances of these new practices of the self like this:

> The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived of as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.
>
> (Foucault 1984b: 40–1)

Enacting and identifying with Tara through the ritual practice provided women with a technique for modifying the self by attempting to adopt qualities and subjectivities that they may not otherwise have adopted. In doing so, Tara practice appeared to enable them to test the limits of womanhood that had been imposed on them.

A particular way in which Tara disrupted the women's previous notions of womanhood was through the incorporation of wrath in her repertoire of being.

Tara's wrath was discussed and performed several times in the focus groups. As Lisa notes:

> I like that sort of wrathful expression where she stamps her feet … boom (stamps her feet),[7] you do that as a Mother … when you've done the nice thing three times and then it hasn't worked and then you said 'I'm telling you' that tough love sort of stuff … got to be wrathful to teach at times … but without harming … it's not wrathful like belting the bejeezus out of them … type of thing.

The appeal of Tara's multiplicity, for the last three groups particularly, was strongly linked to the importance they attributed to being engaged with and helping others. In a conversation within the Sakya focus group, the manner in which Tara is seen to use a wrathful methodology with a nurturing intention emerges in a subtle way:

MICHELLE: To me, that's really the feminine part of her.
LISA: That nurturing part of her.
MICHELLE: Yeah, she gets out and nurtures … she gets out and does things … and that's the thing I like about it.
JOAN: She takes care, doesn't she?
MICHELLE: Care of people.
JOAN: [with fists raised] She takes care of things.
[All laugh loudly.]

The laughter is perhaps a response to the irony that, within a discussion about Tara's nurturing, feminine part, 'taking care of things' comes to be used in a colloquial sense of sorting situations out aggressively or heavy handedly, a method usually associated with men. So in Tara, the essentialized feminine quality of nurture is morphed and grafted with a trait that would be considered, in essential terms, as masculine: forceful, dominating, taking care of things. The irony of seeing these dualistic qualities intermingling in the one being appears to trigger the laughter and reveals that, while their construction of Tara incorporates essentialist notions of the feminine, it also, at times, disrupts them.

Participants highly valued Tara's compassionate nature, while simultaneously being appealed by the dynamic, effectiveness of her engagement. In traditional Tibetan accounts, Tara is particularly known for her swift readiness to engage with the world to relieve suffering and this quality was highlighted in the interviews. As Diane, from the Gelug group, says: '*[S]he's* not sitting around knitting baby socks. She's very dynamic. She's a female Bodhisattva so affecting change in the world by very dynamic means. So compassionate, but very active as well.' Michelle, from the Sakya group, gives particular emphasis to Tara's hands-on approach:

> If people are suffering, she actually gets out there and does things … I find that I like the fact that she's a doer. She gets in there and helps people … and that's the thing I like about her. I feel in doing the practice in some way that … that I'm doing that too.

Recognition of 'the second shift' may also help us to understand why Tara's multiplicity and engagement was appealing to the women interviewed. Although second-wave feminism granted women more access to paid employment, their domestic responsibilities and duties of care generally continued. As a result, in many instances women adopted a 'second shift', fulfilling the modern responsibilities of paid work as well as traditional female roles as dutiful wife and mother (Woodhead 2007b: 119). The complexities involved in maintaining both roles, one rewarded for competitive dedication and another rewarded for emotional care, creates challenging contradictions for women (Woodhead 2007b). In such an environment, the appeal of Tara's skilful, yet compassionate engagement, enabled by her multiple and contradictory qualities, makes a lot of sense. The appeal of Tara's multiplicity, inclusive of wrath, suggests that she provided a new way to handle the complexities of 'the second shift' and the changing nature of traditional roles and identities.

In Tara, the women interviewed had a resource whereby they could challenge the dichotomies of being either a soft, passive, carer of others or a strong, assertive, dynamic woman. As the grip of traditional sources of meaning and identity erode, women in late modernity are granted the 'precarious freedom' of being able to invent and construct identities from new sources (Houtman and Aupers 2008: 109). In such a context, engagement with Tara becomes part of a 'post-traditional identity-exploration' (Woodhead 2007b: 13).

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to convey some of the prominent characteristics present in the construction of Green Tara by female Australian Tibetan Buddhist practitioners and to understand the significance of gender, feminism and thus culture in that construction. The research showed that culture does impact on the meaning and usage of religious doctrines and practices. In regards to Tara, feminism in particular influenced how Tara was understood.

Tara's gender and her vow, her multiplicity and her engagement were the most prominent features in her reconstruction by Australian women. Tara's appeal was due to both her caring, compassionate nature and how she challenged essential notions of how women care. Although Tara mirrors essentialized female gender roles, which have tended to be organized around sacrificial care for the other, she also disrupts them by embodying a dynamic strength and multiplicity, inclusive of wrath.

In presenting new possibilities for identity and engagement, Tara practice appears, like Foucault's practices of the self, as 'a treasury of devices, techniques, ideas and procedures' (Foucault 1984a: 349) that becomes an experiment in 'going beyond' limited notions of womanhood. By reshaping gendered identities, Australian women use Tibetan Buddhism in a way that can alter micro-power

relations. As such, the way in which the women engage with Tara challenges unilateral assessments of the relationship between religion and women. It also offers insights into how Australian women use Tibetan Buddhism to forge a transformation of identity and meaning.

The research contests that religions with a patriarchal history are necessarily or entirely oppressive to women. Rather, the meaning of traditional religious practices are reframed and reapplied to suit the contemporary needs of Australian individuals. This suggests one reason why Buddhism persists in modern societies; it enables individuals to access forms of sacred power through redefining their selves, while also articulating an emphasis on compassionate engagement with others.

Notes

1 Thanks to Cristina Rocha, Michelle Barker, Penny Rossiter and Judith Snodgrass, for their invaluable comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

2 Many versions of Tara's mythical history exist. See Beyer 1973: 64–5; Willson 1986: 34; Galland 1998: 50–51.

3 A noteworthy exception is a special edition of the *Australian Feminist Review*, entitled 'Feminisms, religions, cultures, identities' (1999), edited by Kath McPhillips.

4 See Klein 2001: chapter 2, for an understanding of the western origins of the concept of personhood.

5 At least 10 were conducted between 2008 and 2009.

6 This was organized by Drogmi Retreat Centre and Sakya Tharpa Ling Buddhist Meditation Centre.

7 Lisa is presumably referring to the stanza from the 'Twenty-One Praises to Tara' that states 'Homage! She who smites the ground with Her palm, and with Her foot beats it!'

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2 Buddhist impacts on land and culture

1 Buddhifying Australia

Multicultural capital and Buddhist material culture in rural Victoria

Sally McAra

What are the effects of a project entailing the construction of a building, modelled on a fifteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist stupa, into a twenty-first-century rural Australian setting? How do the Anglo-Celtic adherents of Tibetan Buddhism, who constitute a religious but not an ethnic minority in Australia, position their stupa project in relation to the wider social context? Members of a large international Buddhist organization called the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) are building their stupa at Atisha Centre, 14km from the centre of Bendigo in northwest central Victoria. Named the 'Great Stupa of Universal Compassion' (henceforth, the stupa), its builders promote this distinctively Tibetan edifice as 'the largest stupa in the western world.' This eight-storey structure, modelled on a 43 metre-high stupa consecrated in Gyantse in southern Tibet in 1474, fulfils its role both as a monument enclosing sacred relics and as a temple in which people can gather to hear dharma teachings and engage in related practices, a role made possible by contemporary building materials. In this chapter, I take this instance of the creation of a distinctly Buddhist built environment in a non-Buddhist society to explore how plans to 'buddhify' a particular piece of Australian countryside interrelate with Australian discourses, especially governmental ones, about immigration and multiculturalism.[1]

Despite governmental efforts to reinvent Australia as a multicultural society in recent decades, contemporary zoning regulations and planning application processes often make the establishment of new religious buildings by minority groups an expensive and difficult process (Vasi 2006; Skennar, this volume; Waitt, this volume). Neighbourhood opposition to visibly 'foreign' religious architecture in city and suburban settings has often been vociferous (Dunn, Thompson, Hanna, Murphy and Burnley 2001). This may be expressed in terms of religious prejudice, as in the case of the Nan Tien temple in Wollongong (Waitt),[2] traffic and noise disturbances or subjective notions of visual incompatibility with the locale.

Despite potential for major opposition due to its size and unusualness, the stupa project passed its city council planning application in 1999 relatively smoothly. My interest in this chapter is how the stupa proponents aligned the project with the kinds of discourse that local elites[3] favour, that is, in terms of two kinds of 'enrichment' – in the metaphorical sense of multicultural diversity and in the literal sense of economic growth (McAra 2009). My focus here is the former kind.

I argue that the stupa proponents' success thus far is a result of this alignment, alongside their access to significant social and cultural capital, which empowers them at a more implicit level. Before continuing, it is worth noting the religious motivation behind the stupa project. Alongside teachings about attaining enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings, the FPMT's spiritual director, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, emphasizes the construction and veneration of 'holy objects' such as stupas, statues and prayer wheels. At one level, seeing holy objects helps dharma practitioners by inspiring them. But he also maintains that when dedicated practitioners sponsor or venerate holy objects, they receive spiritual purification that will assist their comprehension and realization of teachings. Further, even beings[4] with no interest in or capacity to understand the dharma receive positive karmic imprints to be reborn as human, hear the dharma and ultimately become enlightened. Thus for Lama Zopa and his students, constructing holy objects brings great spiritual benefit for all. Benefits to Bendigo's identity and economy, as discussed here, are seen as secondary.

Building connections

In June 2007 His Holiness the Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of the Gelugpa sect of which the FPMT is part, visited the incomplete structure. During the official welcome speeches, the Mayor of Bendigo, Julie Rivendell, referred to her city as a place that celebrated diversity and creativity. She quoted from the city's 'Community Plan', a public consultation document developed in 2005 to outline a vision for the city's future:

> Two years ago the citizens of Greater Bendigo developed a vision for the Bendigo we aspire to in the future. As a 'welcoming and inclusive place enriched by the multicultural diversity of our city; that acknowledges and celebrates creativity; where all residents are valued and can participate in community life.' Our Community Plan reflects the human values that we share. The Great Stupa of Universal Compassion will stand here, as a symbol in the Southern Hemisphere that embodies these values.
>
> (Rivendell 2007)

In representing the stupa as a contribution to her city's multicultural diversity, Rivendell reiterated the discourse of governmental multiculturalism that Hage analyses (1998). Hage maintains that this discourse situates 'white Australians'[5] as the managers of a culturally diverse nation and ethnic minorities as peripheral subjects who provide cultural enrichment, which I refer to here as 'multicultural capital' to reflect Bourdieu's analyses of various forms of cultural, social and economic capital (1986). According to the multiculturalist discourse, Australia is a nation of diverse cultures that all have something to contribute, so long as they do so in line with the dominant group's concepts of those cultures. The stupa project, presented as a multicultural contribution that enriches the locale and nation, provides a particular instance of how multicultural capital can be deployed in Australia.

The project's Chief Executive Officer is Ian Green, a student of Lama Zopa. Atisha Centre is built on land that Ian's father, Ed Green, donated to the FPMT in 1981. This property gave the project a major advantage in gaining public acceptance: they already owned land and Atisha Centre had become well known over the years by offering open days and meditation courses to locals. By contrast, a group that must begin with finding and purchasing a new property has to negotiate with neighbours who know little about them, making objections more likely and rendering the planning application process more difficult.

In Bourdieu's usage, social capital is 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition' (1986: 248). That is, those who possess social capital have access to social networks, dispositions and knowledge that open up access to resources (Bourdieu 1986: 248–52). An agent or group of agents can mobilize concentrations of capital through participation in networks of friends and acquaintances (Bourdieu 1986: 249), through membership in a religious organization and so forth. Cultural capital is usually acquired unconsciously via socialization but is often marked in ways that others can detect, such as mannerisms, articulate speech, educational credentials, aesthetic preferences and so forth (Bourdieu 1986: 245). Thus people involved with the stupa project unknowingly present themselves in such a way that facilitates communication with those whose support they require. Like economic capital, social and cultural capital are resources that people can individually or collectively draw on to 'maintain and enhance their positions in the social order' (Swartz 1997: 73).

Most of the FPMT Buddhists associated with Atisha Centre are relatively privileged Anglo-Australians (that is, those of Anglo-Celtic or European descent) and members of the dominant stratum of Australian society, which becomes evident when the stupa's progress in gaining public support is compared with parallel efforts by ethno-religious minorities in Australia (McAra 2009). As local Anglo-Australians, the stupa proponents have an advantage over recent immigrant Buddhists in that they participate in long-established social networks and have access to local forms of cultural and social capital in ways that many immigrant Buddhists do not, although situations vary and some immigrant Buddhists have successfully established major centres (Waitt, this volume). This capital has assisted them to navigate the council regulations, organize high-profile events and inspire large donations. Further, Ian Green's long advertising career, based in Melbourne and Bendigo, has given him useful social connections and valuable experience in the field of public relations, providing the know-how that he needed to foster support for the project among his connections in Bendigo and beyond. Ian Green's cultural capital enhances his communication with Bendigo elites, allowing him to build connections and align the aspirations of the stupa project with issues of concern to local business and government, especially through highlighting its cultural and economic benefits.

Eminent Buddhist leaders who have visited the stupa site include Sakya Trizin and the Dalai Lama (both highly respected Tibetan leaders), and Thich Phuoc Hue

(the patriarch of the United Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation in Australia and New Zealand). Having people with high-level connections helps to gain media attention. The Dalai Lama's visit is the best example of this. His visit also lends the project further legitimacy insofar as people respect him. As Ian says, 'to have His Holiness come here is really like the final stamp of approval' (Nexus n.d.), with currency not only in the Tibetan Buddhist world but also in the eyes of Australian media and Bendigo elites, who were impressed by the occasion. *Chorten Stupa Edition*, the project's newsletter, documents these visits and their statements of support, along with those of important local, national or international figures, for instance, various Bendigo mayors, state members of parliament, and a director from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Melbourne.

Cosmo-multiculturalism

When I talk with tertiary-educated, urban Australians about the stupa project, they often exclaim in astonishment: 'Why Bendigo?' For instance, I described the stupa's scale and cost to 'William', the schoolteacher husband of a Melburnian colleague. Noting that his incredulous response was an echo of numerous others from urban Australians, I asked him: 'What is it about Bendigo that makes you say that?' His understanding was that Bendigo is a conservative place and that to build a stupa there, rather than in Melbourne, seemed outlandish. Presumably, he thought that Tibetan Buddhism was too cosmopolitan for a small city like Bendigo or that multiculturalism is primarily a big-city phenomenon.

White Australians take two distinct managerial stances vis-à-vis immigrants (Hage 1998: 201). The first is that of white 'cosmo-multiculturalists', also referred to as 'white cosmopolites', who consider cultural diversity as something that enriches their lives. These people constitute a hitherto unrecognized 'national type' that represents the multicultural era (Hage 1998: 200), in contrast with those whom literature on Australian nationalism identifies in relation to earlier periods.[6] This 'white cosmopolite' type is implicit in discourses of white multiculturalism (Hage 1998: 201) and these people are typically urban and detached from their roots, but with British or European origins and a middle- or upper-class habitus that disposes them towards 'appreciating and consuming "high-quality" commodities and cultures, including "ethnic" culture.' White multiculturalists envisage themselves in the centre of this new diversity that immigrants have brought. The other side of this is that they consider the suburbs and regional cities and towns to be deficient because they lack that diversity, hence William's attitude towards Bendigo.

While white multiculturalists consider their own lives enriched by the new minority groups, they share certain features with those who oppose immigration because both categories consider themselves as the ones who should determine how much immigration they will tolerate and, as a corollary, how much the newcomers may, metaphorically or literally, change the existing landscape. Hage's critical point is that white multiculturalism entails an ethos that celebrates the ideal of cultural diversity while in practice enabling urban white Australians to retain

their 'governmental position … through a process of incorporating Australia's multicultural reality by constructing it into a reality of tamed ethnicities structured around a primary White culture' (Hage 1998: 209). Aspects of these pro- and anti-multiculturalist discourses can be discerned in public responses to the stupa project.

Out of character with the area?

The planning application for the stupa was filed in April 1999, under the council's categories of 'place of assembly/worship' and 'tourist establishment.' The application passed with two submissions against it and one in favour. The council minutes for the meeting that discussed the stupa application record that approval was granted and conclude that while the stupa will have 'some local visual impact' and generate traffic, it will be of 'major economic importance to the Municipality, as it will attract visitors and tourists to Bendigo from around Australia and the world'.

The countryside around Atisha Centre is primarily pastoral farmland with areas of state forest. Apart from the low hills such as those on which the monastery and stupa site are situated, the near flat landscape and trees allow no wide vistas, meaning that the stupa will mostly not be visible from afar. Both objections came from couples who lived on blocks of land within a few kilometres of the proposed stupa. One noted that the stupa would be 'very vivid in its colours' which 'would be detrimental to the natural surroundings of this area.' To reinforce this argument, the authors added that the council required them 'to paint our zincalume sheds a muted colour and screen with trees. A building such as this stupa being so high would be impossible to screen from the neighbours in such a way.' The second objection maintained that the stupa would be 'out of character with the area', becoming the 'dominant visual feature' in the neighbourhood, and that '[a] building based on a design from 15th century Tibet hardly fits appropriately into a 20th century semi rural Victorian setting.' This objection also expressed concern about traffic, security (including unspecified undesirable people who might come to the Buddhist centre and then intrude on neighbouring properties) and the removal of native flora. This last point, they maintained, 'flies in the face of the general thrust of education towards conservation of natural environments'.

Beneath the points the objectors made lies another concern arising out of resistance to the dominant discourse of multiculturalism. Those opposing the stupa in terms of its alleged cultural incongruity seem to fear that they have lost control of the nation and are being increasingly displaced by migrants and Aboriginals using what Hage calls a 'discourse of Anglo decline' (Hage 1998: 20). I spoke to one of the objectors by telephone, who told me that she and her husband did not want to see the stupa over the treetops from their house and asked: 'Why don't they put it in town near the Chinese Museum?' For her, the museum (the most prominent marker of Bendigo's Chinese heritage) and the stupa were both 'Asian' and 'exotic' and therefore belonged together. With the other stupa critics discussed here,[7] she considered a Tibetan-style stupa to be incompatible with how

she imagined Australian countryside should be, constituting very visible evidence of a loss of a familiar, local sense of place, a loss of ground to something foreign. This is consistent with Friedman's suggestion that Hage could have given more consideration to class relations between cosmopolitans, who identify with multiculturalism, and downwardly mobile and working classes, who do not. Friedman suggests that 'the xenophobia of the powerless', rather than being about losing control of the nation, is concerned with losing 'control over local sociality, a feeling of homelessness' (2000: 269).

The stupa objectors' comments, while muted in comparison to objections to similarly prominent non-Christian religious edifices elsewhere in Australia (see Dunn et al. 2001; McAra 2009: chapter 6), are significant because, as noted, Anglo-Celtic Australian opposition to immigrants' alterations of the built environment has often been strident and provoked much public debate. For some it is a disruption to their sense of place, a sign of the decline of Anglo-Celtic Australian culture or of Christianity or a waste of money in the face of other more pressing social or environmental issues. The objectors' criticism of the stupa hints at the backlash against multiculturalism that Hage identifies with white Australian victims who fear a 'conspiracy to change the very nature of the country' (Hage 1998: 20). These conservative white Australians resent the apparent erosion of their familiar, 'traditional' Australian way of life. Their discourse of backlash blames immigrants from non-European/non-English-speaking backgrounds for much of this change.

Putting Bendigo on the world map

The Bendigonians who engage in Tibetan Buddhist practice, or are sympathetically disposed towards it, tend to be sympathetic towards multiculturalism, aspiring to see their city become more culturally diverse, perhaps as a way of marking themselves as a significant city rather than a large country town. For example, in explaining the stupa in media interviews, Ian says: 'We live in Australia which is a multicultural nation and because we're establishing Australian Buddhism so to speak it's very appropriate that it should be a multicultural form of Buddhism' (Nexus, n.d.). He is speaking the same language as Rivendell, here referring to how the stupa has found support with the Australian Vietnamese community and further afield in Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand, with the intention of highlighting that the stupa is compatible with and indeed a contribution to a multicultural society.

As in Mayor Rivendell's speech, official positions on the stupa reiterate the dominant governmental discourses of Australia as a tolerant, multicultural society, occasionally expressing pride in Bendigo as a city with a distinct identity. For the city's elites, the stupa's exoticism is an important contribution to Bendigo's cultural capital. As a small but growing regional city, Bendigo aspires to develop its image as a diverse and lively place. In a speech quoted in *Chorten*, Maurice Sharkey, an earlier mayor of Bendigo, spoke about the project as something that bolsters 'a community like Bendigo'. He added: '[W]e do ourselves no favours by

thinking small … We can achieve big things.' His speech also takes ownership of this project as a show of strength for the city of Bendigo, to foster a sense of pride in the city and the capacities of the community (as mayors are expected to do), while its reproduction in *Chorten* highlights the project's endorsement from city elites. Bendigo's elites attempt, through supporting the stupa, to foster a sense of their city's own local distinctiveness, in part to attract tourist visits and revenue and in part to bolster their own sense of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. But this is how mayors talk. What of the wider Bendigo public?

As I met people in the course of living in Bendigo in 2003, I asked what they thought about the stupa. Some had not heard about it, but when I showed them the project's brochure, the most common response was either mild incredulity at the ambitiousness and unusualness of the project or an expression of anticipation that it would provide a valuable tourist attraction. For instance, a woman I met on the Bendigo to Melbourne train exclaimed: 'What a coup for Bendigo!' Others, like the objectors, felt that it would be incompatible with what they understood to be the character of the region. One elderly Methodist woman I met while waiting at the Bendigo railway station had heard of Atisha Centre because her goddaughter attended the Sunday meditations. She was nonetheless surprised when I showed her a picture of the Gyantse stupa and she exclaimed: 'Goodness, it'll look a bit funny sticking out of the bush!'

Perhaps in anticipation of such comments, the stupa publicity asserts that it is compatible with the region's cultural history by linking the Tibetan structure to the region's Chinese history, noting: 'Buddhism is no recent visitor to Bendigo. It first came in the 1850s with the Chinese gold diggers' (Great Stupa of Universal Compassion brochure n.d., n.p.). This appeal to Bendigo's Chinese heritage is interesting, given the sad history of Chinese–Tibetan relations, the very different religious practices and sociocultural status of the Chinese gold diggers and the very different path that Tibetan Buddhism has taken to Australia. Despite all of this, the alignment makes sense in terms of the city's economic development because one of the primary tourist attractions in Bendigo today is its goldmining heritage, of which the Chinese connection is one important part.

The city's Golden Dragon Museum and Joss House provide year-round attractions, while the highlight of Bendigo's annual Easter festival is Chinese dragon and lion dancing performed by local troupes. The Golden Dragon Museum plans to build a 50 metre-high (nine-storey) pagoda, an East Asian style tower that constitutes a variant form of stupa. The museum website represents the structure as an enhancement of the existing institution that will house displays on the arts and crafts of the various Chinese dynasties with a revolving restaurant at the top. It is significant that Bendigo could become home to not one but two Buddhist monuments that are justified in terms of their potential as tourist attractions and linked with the region's history of Chinese connections. Letters to the *Advertiser*, from 2003–2008, indicate a positive public response to this plan because of the perceived benefits in terms of tourism to the city. For example, in his letter, McKenzie expresses a strong preference for the pagoda and stupa projects over a proposal to spend $500,000 on a sculpture in the city's mall (2008). He suggests

the pagoda and stupa will be a better way to 'put Bendigo on the world map' and 'leave a legacy for future generations' by attracting international tourists.

The stupa project is an unusual example of changes to Australia's religious landscape because it brings an unfamiliar architectural style as immigrant religious minorities sometimes do, but in this case its main proponents are themselves part of the ethnic majority. Further, many Australian FPMT members belong to professional/managerial classes in which these white multiculturalists, the consumers at the centre of the discourse of multiculturalism, are found. This positioning gave them a particular advantage in the form of an accumulation of social capital in negotiations with the wider society during the planning application phase. At the same time, Tibetan Buddhism has, among certain liberal, middle-class sectors internationally, acquired a certain chic (see, for example, Lopez 1999; Congdon 2007) that gives it cultural capital in the context of public negotiations around the stupa, at least among those who belong to the demographic in which Buddhism has a positive public image. Indeed, the majority of Tibetan Buddhism's new western adherents and sympathizers come from the very same mostly tertiary-educated, professional middle and upper classes who are most likely to participate in or influence city council decisions.

Bendigo city councillors and others in leadership roles would like their city to be more prosperous, more cosmopolitan and more multicultural. Further, some white cosmopolites find certain expressions of Buddhism attractive, for instance, appreciating the aesthetic qualities of Buddhist art, or becoming what Tweed calls 'Buddhist sympathizers' who read books on Buddhist teachings without contact with dharma teachers or organizations (1999). This brings me to a further form of cultural capital involved in the stupa project. Tibetan Buddhism's attractiveness among certain sectors of upper- and middle-class Anglo-Australian society works in favour of the stupa. In Australia, the same people who advocate multiculturalism also speak about Buddhism in positive terms. Their discourse stresses religious and intercultural tolerance, varying from 'Buddhism is welcome because it is a peaceful religion', to 'Buddhism is less threatening than Islam'. By way of example, in May 2003 I attended the Buddhist Society of Victoria's 50th Anniversary celebration at Box Hill Town Hall in Melbourne, an occasion that illustrated how people link the concepts of multiculturalism, tolerance and Buddhism as a peaceful religion. For instance, one state member of parliament, Christopher Strong, said that new immigrants in Victoria have 'enriched our lives'; using the classic discourse of enrichment – 'our lives' refers, as Hage would say, to the white Australians at the centre. Strong characterized Buddhism as 'not aggressive, exclusive, and intolerant of other faiths' stating further that 'we can't afford faiths that are intolerant of others'. At the same event, Ajahn Brahmavamso, an English Buddhist monk ordained in the Thai Forest Sangha tradition and abbot of a monastery near Perth, said that there 'has never been a war fought in the name of Buddhism', a key refrain that Buddhists and Buddhist sympathizers use often. Similarly, in Bendigo, Rod Fyfe (the Bendigo mayor in 2003) told me that the stupa represented peace and compassion and this was more important to him personally than the economic benefits. Underlying such representations are implicit comparisons

with stereotypes about Islamic fundamentalism's violence. This discourse says, 'Buddhism is peaceful', giving the stupa project more symbolic capital than a mosque, because it represents Buddhism as more compatible with 'Australian' values of tolerance than the purportedly fanatical Islam. These ways of thinking and talking about the project as beneficial to Bendigo are effective in circles where the religious discourses of the power of the holy object are not.

Multicultural capital

At the same time as the stupa proponents possess certain advantages through their membership of the dominant ethnic group, their project also benefits from Tibetan Buddhism's religious minority status in Australia. This is a deployment of 'multicultural capital' that helps to render the stupa more intelligible and acceptable in the region. In this I do not mean that any particular manipulation is involved. Rather, the point I wish to make is that the buddhification of Australia depends on more than the missionary impetus of the converts and their teachers; it also depends on the extent to which the project's proponents participate in and align themselves with hegemonic discourses about Buddhism and about cultural diversity. Mayor Rivendell's speech, which maintains that the project fits with the city's community plan, demonstrates the alignment.

A further, related point pertains to the stupa's appearance. Despite the two objections cited earlier, the alleged 'incompatibility' of the stupa project with its rural Victorian setting is itself a factor in accruing support. Both the Nan Tien temple that Waitt discusses in this volume and the stupa project benefit from the fact that their city councils, in line with governmental discourses of multiculturalism, now regard cultural diversity as enriching in both cultural and economic terms. Having this structure as a local landmark contributes to attempts to market Bendigo as a culturally diverse, vibrant place. The discourse of cultural enrichment represents the stupa not only as a significant tourist attraction, but also something that will help the city to become more multicultural and cosmopolitan, bringing the peaceful exoticism of Tibetan Buddhism to Bendigo without de-centering existing power relations.

Notes

1 This chapter is based on research that I undertook between 2003 and 2007, including six months of residence in Bendigo. My methods entailed participant observation and the use of sources such as interviews, informal conversations and letters to the local newspaper.

2 The Taiwanese-based Fokuangshan's Nan Tien temple in Wollongong, NSW (Waitt, this volume), is promoted as 'the largest Buddhist temple in the southern hemisphere' (Rala International 1995). Despite some opposition, the temple plans won favour with the Wollongong city council because, as Waitt suggests, local government already wished to rebrand their city as culturally diverse and vital, to attract visitors and their money to the region.

3 Elites refers here to the people in leadership roles whose position empowers them to make crucial decisions about society (Shore 2002: 4). Their access to various forms of capital enables them to gain and maintain such positioning.

4 These are beings that traditional Buddhist cosmology identifies as the six realms of existence: humans, animals, hungry ghosts, gods, demigods and hell beings.
5 Hage uses the term 'White' instead of 'Anglo' because he argues that the former is the dominant, albeit primarily unconscious, mode of self-perception and because it encompasses people of non-Anglo descent who also perceive themselves in this way (1998: 19). He adds that 'Whiteness' is 'a fantasy position of cultural dominance' arising from Europe's history of expansion (20).
6 Hage (2002: 429) characterizes the shift from the conservative Liberal government of Malcolm Fraser (1975–1982) to the Labor government of Bob Hawke (1982–1992) as a shift between two approaches to multiculturalism. The former was an adjunct to a white Australia that did not compete with it. While the latter was still Anglo-Celtic, immigration had transformed its identity into what was represented as 'a higher type of Anglo-Celtic civilization' (Hage 2002: 429) that appealed to the growing category of middle-class, well-travelled Australians who, in seeking to be cosmopolitan, wished to distance themselves from their country's image as a 'racist colonial backwater' (Hage 2002: 429). While these views are associated with metropolitan Australia, elites in regional centres like Bendigo have similar aspirations.
7 Elsewhere I discuss other expressions of support and other criticism, including the views of a Buddhist-Theosophist opponent and an Aboriginal activist and her supporters (McAra 2009).

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2 Locating a Buddhist temple in Wollongong, New South Wales

Gordon Waitt

The aim of this chapter is to examine why the largest Buddhist temple in the southern hemisphere (Nan Tien Temple – Paradise of the Southern Hemisphere) is located in Wollongong, New South Wales, a city built on a heavy industry legacy of coalmining and steelmaking. The choice of Wollongong may, therefore, seem quite remarkable at first, a decision which becomes even more astonishing when considering the small numbers that comprised the resident Buddhist community. Similarly, the site, in the suburb of Berkeley, appears equally puzzling given its proximity to a freeway, industrial estates and residential suburbs. An explanation for this location puzzle is sought within the discourses of the aldermen of Wollongong City Council, the Christian ministries and the Fo Kuang Shan. To help explore the location of Nan Tien Temple in the Wollongong suburb of Berkeley, data were collected from a range of sources through participatory observation, interviews with key informants and the collection of texts offering representations of the temple including: newspaper articles, the International Buddhist Association's newsletters and Wollongong City Council documents. Discourses identified as most critical to informing the decision to locate the temple in Berkeley were those pertaining to geomancy, multiculturalism, faith and tourism marketing.

The chapter has five sections. The first section introduces Nan Tien Temple and Wollongong. The second section then explores why a Taiwanese Buddhist sect would even consider locating a temple in a regional Australian city with an industrial legacy of coal and steel. The third section discusses the ambivalence of Christian ministries to Nan Tien Temple. The fourth identifies how the aldermen of Wollongong City Council framed the temple complex within the discourses of multiculturalism and orientalism. The conclusion discusses the implications of these different discursive framings for Buddhists as citizens of Wollongong.

Nan Tien Temple, Berkeley, Wollongong, New South Wales

In October 1995, Grand Master Hsing Yun presided over the opening ceremony of Nan Tien Temple. In doing so, Grand Master Hsing Yun (who founded the Fo Kuang Shan Buddhist Sect in 1967 in Taiwan) effectively created a Buddhist sacred site in the suburb of Berkeley, Wollongong. For the Fo Kuang Shan the site links heaven and earth; the complex is referred to as a 'pure land on earth'. For

over three years, Wollongong residents had watched the previously vacant, council owned land on the north side of Berkeley's Flagstaff Hill being transformed into one of the world's largest Buddhist shrines, costing an estimated A$50 million. The 9.65 hectare site included a temple with its main shrine, auditorium, dining and kitchen facilities, accommodation, classrooms, meditation rooms, museum, library, sleeping quarters and administration area. The adjacent pagoda had two shrines and alcoves for the ashes of 73,000 people. This Buddhist sacred site was bounded by residential property along the southwest border, the publicly owned Wollongong Crematorium along the northeast boundary, the F6 Freeway along the northwest border and, to the south, another vacant council block, the summit of Flagstaff Hill. The temple's gates, its Buddha statues and Chinese palace architectural style – dominated by brilliant green, red, yellow and ochre colours – visually introduced a new set of symbols that contrasted starkly with the surrounding light industry sheds, power cables, F6 Freeway and roofs of suburbia. Equally striking was the introduction of a new set of religious practices associated with a Buddhist sacred site into a suburb previously dominated by routines of work, home and predominantly Christian cremation. The sanctified site was separated from the profane through naming, knowing, ceremony, rites and spatial organization (Jackson and Henrie 1983: 94). As Carmichael, Hubert, Reeves and Schanche (1994) argued, sacred sites become vested with cultural identity and place-based attachments through being vested with a whole range of rites and a set of beliefs.

In the 1990s, Wollongong, situated some 80 km south of Sydney, may have at first appeared a remarkable location. Of the 140,000 Buddhists resident in Australia in 1991 when decisions over the temple's location were being considered, the majority lived in the state of New South Wales (59,000), particularly in the Sydney suburbs of Fairfield (19,904) and Bankstown (13,691) (ABS 1991). Sydney was the more obvious choice. Indeed, since 1988, the Fo Kuang Shan already had an established presence in the central business district of Sydney (the Nan Tien Centre, Darling Harbour). In part, this was to accommodate the increasing numbers of Buddhist who were migrants from Vietnam and later, from Burma, China, and Hong Kong.

Wollongong, unlike Sydney, neither provided the infrastructure nor had the economy to attract large numbers of more recent Asian migrants. In comparison, according to the 1995 Australian census, Wollongong, had a total population of over 210,000, which was predominantly Christian, with only around 800 Buddhists, these being widely distributed throughout its suburban matrix. While the Wollongong City Council praised the city's cultural diversity, the population remained fairly homogeneous by religion. Christianity predominated and even the majority of people from non-English speaking countries had a European heritage (predominantly from Italy, Macedonia, Germany, Netherlands and Greece). This cultural heritage reflected Wollongong's post-World War II migration policies and the labour requirements of Wollongong's steel industry. Equally, the 1995 Australian census data suggested that the suburb of Berkeley was not only predominantly Christian, but also a place of residence to mainly Anglo-Celtic Australians (85%) and a suburb of relative social disadvantage in Wollongong (ABS 1996).

While social diversity was unquestionably a characteristic of urban Wollongong, the social composition of Berkeley remained relatively homogeneous.

Furthermore, in the context of debates regarding Asian immigration during the mid-1990s, analysis of regional variations of ethnocentrism in New South Wales suggested heightened racism within the region, the Illawarra (Dunn and MacDonald 2001). Vilification of minority groups in Wollongong was perhaps elevated by high level of unemployment because of structural changes to the coal and steel-based regional economy (Vasta and Castles 1996).

When the planning processes informing the decisions to include and exclude an ethnic minority religion's place of worship are considered, Wollongong becomes perhaps a less remarkable location for a Buddhist temple. Throughout the 1980s, several Sydney municipal councils deployed town planning and building codes to discriminate against the practice of minority religions, particularly Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. In 1990 the Ethnic Affairs Commission's *Annual Report* concluded that:

> [O]ver the past ten years, minority religions especially ethnic minority religions have found themselves at the centre of major legal battles as well as community conflicts over their right to pursue developments of places of worship and religious instruction as is required by their various doctrines.
>
> (Ethnic Affairs Commission 1990: 17)

The difficulties endured by religious minorities over securing planning permissions culminated in an interdepartmental investigation (Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales 1991). Dunn demonstrated how discourses of Islam as 'fanatical' and 'intolerant' faith heightened unease and widened opposition to the construction of mosques in certain Sydney suburbs (2001: 291). Local authorities refused planning permission for mosques on the grounds that the proposals were out of 'character'with the local neighbourhood (Bouma 1992: 52; Murphy and Watson 1997: 28).

In contrast, Wollongong City Council, under the leadership of the Lord Mayor Frank Arkell (1974–1991) with his catchcry 'Wonderful Wollongong', had championed minority religions' places of worship. For instance, during the 1980s planning consent was given to building a Hindu temple near Helensburgh. Cultural diversity was seemingly embraced as a potential mechanism to signify vitality to potential investors in what was increasingly a depressed local economy.

In the 1990s Nan Tien Temple provided another opportunity for Wollongong City Council to revitalize the local economy along 'cultural capital' lines (where 'symbolic' consumption practices provide a basis for capital accumulation rather than production). Throughout the 1980s international competition and the associated process of deindustrialization severely damaged Wollongong's economic base of coalmining and steelmaking. Closure of coalmines and massive job loss associated with the restructuring of the steelworks had far reaching effects throughout the local economy, generating long-term structural unemployment. Higher than national average unemployment rates then combined with negative

portrayals in Sydney's print media, which wrote at length about the 'Steel City's' pollution, unemployment and crime, to sustain a grim, ugly, 'rust-town' place image. Such was the negative place image that Australian comedians ridiculed Wollongong as a 'nowhere' place. In 1984 the place name 'Wollongong' was so tarnished that Harold Hanson, then chair of the Leisure and Tourist Association, unsuccessfully proposed that the city should change its name to 'Illawarra', after the surrounding region.

Since the 1980s, rather than a name change, the Wollongong City Council ran a series of place promotion campaigns. The first centred on the slogan, 'the Leisure Coast', the most recent, 'the City of Innovation'. 'The Leisure Coast' strategy was to reinvent Wollongong as Sydney's playground. The campaign came replete with images of outdoor recreation and adventure sports set against a backdrop of rainforests, beaches and waterfalls. However, in the 'place wars' over sharing the domestic tourist and leisure market dollar, the lack of a unique, 'must-see' attraction handicapped Wollongong. Securing Nan Tien Temple would complement Wollongong City Council's objective of re-imaging the city and restructuring the local economic base within the service sector, particularly tourism. The next section examines the discourses of the Fo Kuang Shan in the choice to locate Nan Tien Temple in Wollongong.

Fo Kuang Shan, geomancy and Nan Tien Temple

Faith and geomancy are crucial to explain why a Taiwanese Buddhist sect would consider Australia, yet alone Wollongong, as a suitable site for a temple complex. According to the Buddhist faith, constructing a temple complex is a symbol of the devotion of the person who erected it, a means by which they can accumulate the merits needed for achieving final enlightenment. In the late 1980s the Fo Kuang Shan's Grand Master Hsing Yun was contemplating constructing an Australian temple to fulfil his objective to propagate the dharma globally, complementing monasteries and temples in 26 other countries including Canada, Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines and the United States. It is believed that Grand Master Hsing Yun first learnt about Wollongong when canvassed in Taiwan by Christine Yuen, a Vietnamese–Australian from the Illawarra, about the possibilities of building a temple in Wollongong. The local resident praised the region's beauty and proximity to Sydney.

Early in 1989 Grand Master Hsing Yun visited Wollongong and the proposed Flagstaff Hill site. This was a favourable location according to the time–space 'surface' of the fengshui-influenced worldview. A fengshui worldview identified flows of cosmic energy known as qi. Teather and Chow (2000: 312) note that the set of ideas underpinning fengshui are an 'attempt to manipulate the future, by organising one's use of time and space in order to fit the patterning of the universe'. The north-facing relationship of Flagstaff Hill with Mount Keira and Mount Kembla was an important geomantic selection factor (Park 1994: 247). In the case of Nan Tien Temple, the Reverend Man Sing explained that in Chinese thinking the temple's location in respect to the topography represented a chair,

with Flagstaff Hill acting as the back and Mounts Keira and Kembla forming the arms. Mythological associations with the terrain further determined the temple's alignment. The primary central axis of the complex runs north to south from the summit of Flagstaff Hill through the centre of the temple, then, exactly bisects the angle formed between the temple and the two prominent northern mountains. Thinking about the temple as separate from the deity that created the mountains is impossible in these ways. Aspect and topography were important, not only from the psychological perspective of generating feelings of familiarity, but also for fulfilling metaphysical functions. By coincidence, Wollongong's topography reputedly reminded Grand Master Hsing Yun of a place in which a highly respected Chinese scholar named Wollong once lived. Despite overtures including offers of free land from other local governments to develop the temple in Sydney or Brisbane, Grand Master Hsing Yun decided that Wollongong's elevated Berkeley location was most suitable, given its fengshui.

The spatial organization and structure of the site were then designed as a representation of heavenly space, following principles governing all Chinese Buddhist temples. As a model of heaven, the temple performed four metaphysical functions: a centre, a meeting point, a microcosm of the heavenly realm and an immanent transient presence (Turner 1979: 18–33). As a centre, the temple linked heaven and earth, regarded metaphysically as the channel through which passes the *axis mundi*: all manifestations (the Many) flow down from the Unity (the One), and the souls of the enlightened (the Many) flow back to salvation (the One). In this connection, apart from being the central path of cosmogenesis (the One to the Many), the temple as a supra-mundane paradigm also portrayed a microcosm, or instrument, by which the manifested Many retraced the path of cosmogenesis back to the Origin (the Many Return to the One) (Wilson 1986). The temple as the microcosm represented not only the cosmic process, but also a structure that mirrored the ordered universe, the macrocosm. Thus, building a temple is a miniature of the whole architectural process of making a universe.

A fengshui worldview may explain why the Buddhist sect favoured Wollongong. As a favourable location, Flagstaff Hill provided a site on which to plan a representation of heavenly space, a progenitive centre of the world, linking heaven and earth. In Australia, however, principles of fengshui do not underpin town planning decision processes. Instead, all development application must receive approval from municipal councils after a process involving notifying adjacent landowners and consideration of public objections. In the case of a Buddhist temple, proposed for a predominantly white Australian residential suburb, this planning process is in part informed by an alternative, European bounded set of meanings and values, which is orientalism.

Multiculturalism, Christianity, the state and Nan Tien Temple

Australia's imagined multicultural national identity inspired leaders of the Wollongong Christian ministries to extend an inclusive welcome to the Buddhists. The temple was valued 'in place' as a material expression of a multicultural

Australian identity. However, their welcome was qualified, since the implicit eurocentric assumption of a Christian nation remained. For example, following the opening of the temple the Reverend Reg Piper, then Bishop of Wollongong, was quoted as saying: '[A]s an Australian I welcome it [the temple] but as a Christian I challenge it', adding that Buddhism 'is going to blunt the uniqueness of Christ', and, '[I]t [the temple] will blur the revelations of Christ' (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1995: 25). In further press interviews he stated: 'God is God of all people, owner of all the world … at the same time we affirm that Jesus Christ, the man who was raised from the dead, is the only way to God' (*Illawarra Mercury* 1995: 3). Similarly, Canon Ian Cox expressed the same dilemma: '[W]e [the Anglican Church] value these people [Buddhists] as people … but we have a different view of their religious faith, and we would want to try and help them to come to understand the Christian faith' (personal communication May 1999). In short, behind the multicultural facade inter-religious rivalry is clearly apparent. Theologically based threats provoked strong negative reactions from some Christian ministries, particularly the Anglican clergy. Some Christian leaders spoke openly of how the existence of the temple would highlight theological disagreements. Among some Christian denominations that believe God loves them alone, difference is to be challenged and denied, not championed under a policy of multiculturalism's equivalence of faith.

As discussed by Houston (1986) and Ata (1988), although the official rhetoric positioned the Australian nation firmly within multicultural discourses, the theological debate over 'truth' continued among some Christian denominations. However, among the Christian ministries in Wollongong the scales of judgement were weighted in favour of Christianity. The implied threat to the Australian nation and city imagined as Christian comes from the alternative worldview of the Buddhist faith. Many Christian ministries were ambivalent about the temple. Simultaneously, the temple was 'in place' as a material object representing cultural diversity and 'out of place' metaphysically or spiritually.

Such a qualified welcome acknowledged the temple as a sacred space, through which the site becomes vested with group and self-identity. This acknowledgement often evokes strong negative reactions from those who perceive harm to their own group interests or threats to their 'honour' or 'truths'. Strongest reactions are evoked from persons within the group who have the deepest place-based identification or even feelings of fusion, rather than among those who only have nominal affiliations. This is illustrated in the words of the Anglican minister the Reverend John Thew: '[W]e [Anglicans] strongly disagree with the Buddhist analysis of life', adding that 'some Christians felt threatened by the temple which will bring thousands of devotees into Wollongong every year' (*Illawarra Mercury* 1989a: 3). The challenges of faith presented by Buddhism to Christianity are not new and have been debated ever since Buddhism was 'discovered' by Europeans during the first half of the nineteenth century (Almond 1988). Buddhism's principal theological threat to Christianity arises because it has no deity in the Christian sense, teaching that each person can become a buddha or 'enlightened one' (King 1962).

This spiritual threat was clearly apparent in some opposition letters sent to council and the local media by ardent Christians. For example, one resident expressed his/her concerns as follows:

> I love Wollongong … but I believe that (as a heathen worship) they [Buddhists] will bring a curse not only on the city council, who gave encouragement for this type of worship to be here, but to the whole of the Illawarra district. It will no longer be the beautiful Wollongong, because a curse will bring all types of disasters.
>
> (Letter on file to Wollongong City Council, 19 July 1989)

Another resident explained that:

> I do not want a Buddhist temple in Wollongong … there is only one name by which man can be saved – through Jesus Christ … Buddhism is not the way to God – it is idolatry.
>
> (Letter on file to Wollongong City Council, 5 September 1989)

Many of those who personally self-identified with an alternative faith also appreciated the temple's sacredness. While acknowledging the place as a sacred phenomenon, among regular practitioners of another faith it was not appraised in terms of awe, apartness, otherworldliness, orderliness or wholeness. Instead, often powerful emotions and attitudes are evoked including anger and anxiety. The temple challenged their accepted set of beliefs concerning gods and spirits. At one extreme, those individuals who deeply identified the temple with a particular religious group interpret the temple as representing an attack on or damaging to their religious group's interest or 'honour', and, thus, to their own self. In some extreme instances, therefore, the most ardent Christians wished to exclude the temple from Wollongong. Clearly, for those citizens Buddhism was portrayed as a heathen religion and incompatible with Christian beliefs and did not belong in Wollongong. As a sacred site, the temple should be excluded because Buddhism represented a faith directly in competition to Australia's supposed Christian views of social and moral issues. The Buddhist temple became a symbolic marker of cultural difference that could not be integrated in the local and national imaginary.

Wollongong City Council, brands, orientalism and Nan Tien Temple

Frank Arkell, the then Wollongong City Lord Mayor, played a pivotal role as a key decision maker and negotiator in securing Nan Tien Temple by arguing in favour of affirmative action for non-Christian religions in Wollongong. Unlike many local councillors elsewhere, Arkell reputedly possessed an extensive knowledge of Buddhist history, had a longstanding interest in meditation and was committed to the promotion of religious tolerance. Putatively, these helped Arkell establish a strong rapport with Grand Master Hsing Yun and other directors of the International Buddhist Association, with whom negotiations were conducted.

Arkell portrayed the temple as culturally enriching Wollongong's already ethnically diverse community. At the same time as portraying the temple as nationally 'in place' within the terms of multiculturalism's rhetoric of equivalence of faiths, Arkell also represented the temple as locally 'in place' as a tourist attraction. Opposition from local residents and city councillors was thus diminished by the realization that building Nan Tien Temple created not only a place of Buddhist worship, education and pilgrimage but also a potential mechanism for revitalizing the local economy along cultural capital lines.

Arkell drew on multiculturalism's imagined national community to both facilitate the project and allay local concerns. Arkell portrayed himself as a very spiritual person, an authoritative person on world religions who acknowledged an equivalence of faiths. He is quoted as having built a rapport with Grand Master Hsing Yun by drawing on the strength of his Roman Catholic beliefs and finding an affinity between Buddhism and Roman Catholicism through their shared interest in meditation and silent retreat (*Illawarra Mercury* 1994: 35). Simultaneously, in the local media he championed the cause of religious tolerance by citing scripture. The media reported his response to the opposition voiced in letters addressed to Wollongong City Council by the Christian 'right' (for example, 'Keep yourself from idols', 'Heathens will bring the country down' and 'God will punish us') by reportedly quoting the Biblical injunction to 'love thy neighbour'. He went on to explain that 'Christ is very understanding of all sort of religions … More people need to understand that' (*Illawarra Mercury* 1994: 35). In official council letters attempting to allay concerns over the temple's construction, Arkell also articulated the multicultural rhetoric of requiring tolerance of cultural difference and equivalence of faith, arguing that 'the community of Wollongong is comprised of people from many backgrounds and religions and that they should be permitted to freely exercise their rights of worship' (letter on file from Wollongong City Council, 1989). While local authority planning instruments were employed elsewhere in New South Wales to exclude minority culture religions, inciting racism to discriminate against the location of Buddhist and Islamic places of worship as 'out of place', in Wollongong, such prejudices were diminished by the then Lord Mayor championing their cause.

Arkell also circulated a representation of Nan Tien Temple as a mechanism with which to revitalize the Wollongong economy along cultural capital lines within media releases, council debates over the land sale value and letters responding to opponents. In 1989, when Labor caucus leader, Alderman Bill Barnetson, and Frank Arkell clashed over the proposed land sale price of A$450,000, Arkell argued that the temple would assist with the establishment of a cultural and tourist development. In letters from Wollongong City Council to residents opposing the plan, Arkell again raised the potential economic benefits, stating that:

> [C]ouncil's decision to sell the land took into account both the needs of council to realise upon its unused asset and to assist the community of Wollongong with the provision of not only a Buddhist Temple but a significant tourist attraction for the City.

In the local media, Arkell is quoted as saying, 'the centre would attract worldwide interest and many visitors' (*Illawarra Mercury* 1989b: 14). His views were substantiated by Ian King, the then Leisure Coast Tourist Association manager, who is reported to have simply said '[I]t [the temple] will be a great thing for this city' (*Illawarra Mercury* 1989c: 2). Comparisons were drawn to a similar temple in Los Angeles that drew over 200,000 visitors a year. The construction of the temple would enrich Wollongong culturally, artistically and economically. Wollongong Council finally resolved to sell the land for the construction of Nan Tien Temple on cultural capital grounds, describing the temple as a significant cultural and tourist development to the benefit of the 'community' of Wollongong.

As a tourist attraction the temple relied on being socially constructed as an exotic destination, an object representing the orient, rather than primarily as a sacred site. In portraying the temple as an exotic attraction, under the guise of discourse of multiculturalism, Wollongong Council relied on and reiterated orientalism and the basic distinction between east and west. Rather than challenging understanding of faith in Wollongong, Buddhism was simply added as an exotic extra. Consequently, as Stratton (1998) argues, one of the problems of discourses of multiculturalism is that while it asserts positives from diversity, it locates and confirms the imagined differences within binaries of 'us' and 'them'. Stereotypes of ethnic minorities are redeployed rather than confronted. In this case, Said (1978) has demonstrated how the European discourse of orientalism was underpinned by a number of naturalized binaries (that is, as 'civilized', 'ordered', 'Christian', etc). These always set off Europe (the west) favourably against the orient (the east). Hence, the belonging generated through a capitalist imperative was based on the western assumption that there is an 'us' and a 'them', each quite separate, clear, and unequivocally self-evident. As an exotic tourist attraction, the 'alien' attributes of the temple complex in western terms became the reason for social inclusion in Wollongong. The 'alien', understood as a brand to be marketed, a commodity rather than a living religion, perhaps helped made the temple less confronting for some Wollongong residents.

A Buddhist temple portrayed as a tourist attraction provided a unique site of spectacle that in the 1990s helped re-image Wollongong away from media stereotypes of pollution, unemployment, crime and heavy industry. As a brand, the temple offered possibilities of pitching Wollongong to meet the market demands of those tourists seeking the 'exotic' or cultural difference. For city marketers, the temple offered a means by which to express a new, unique, vitality, and cultural diversity. In short, Buddhism provided a social group to help glamorize the city (see Zukin 1988; 1998). As elsewhere, cultural differentiation played a key role in the process of re-imaging (Lovatt and O'Conner 1995: 127; Montgomery 1995: 143). As a symbol of difference and 'Asian-ness', Nan Tien Temple's social construction is similar to that of Sydney and Melbourne's Chinatowns (Anderson 1990: 137). Nan Tien Temple as a brand or tourist attraction becomes a product and symbol of some single, pure and monolithic 'east', a comparative setting against mainstream Australia.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore why the southern hemisphere's largest Buddhist temple complex was located in Wollongong. Once dubbed the 'Sheffield of the South', Wollongong is more notorious in the settler and migrant Australian geographical imaginations for coal and steel production rather than spirituality. This required examining the different sets of ideas or discourses drawn on by key politicians and leaders of different religious groups that helped give meaning to the proposed site.

Drawing on discourse of geomancy, the Fo Kuang Shan's fengshui interpretation of the locality earmarked Flagstaff Hill as an auspicious sacred site. Equally, when framed within discourse of multiculturalism, both Christian ministries and political leaders agreed the temple complex belonged in Berkeley. Further, when framed by the discourse of orientalism, the temple offered Wollongong City Council with a unique tourist attraction with which to brand the city. In the 1980s, these social conditions were exceptional. At this time local council planning decisions elsewhere in New South Wales often continued to portray Buddhist and Islamic places of worship as 'out of place' in Australian suburbs.

Yet, the different ways in which religious and political authorities spoke of the temple complex belonging within the suburb of Berkeley also has important implications for the role of Buddhists as citizens. The Christian clergy often held an ambivalent position. The Christian ministries envisaged the temple as only materially belonging in Wollongong as part of a multicultural society, but spiritually 'out of place'. Hence, Christian ministries conceived of Buddhist monks and nuns as having only a limited role. As part of multiculturalism, the monks and nuns provided spiritual guidance for Buddhists already resident in Australia. However, any attempt to spread their faith beyond the confines of the temple's boundaries was interpreted as contrary to the identity of Australia as a Christian nation and damaging to the self-identity of Australian Christians. Buddhists were welcomed, but their faith had to be spatially contained within the temple.

Local politicians also employed multiculturalism in their arguments. However, in their case they tended to emphasize Buddhism in terms of a taxonomic object, based on a western invented understanding of the orient, rather than a living religion. Such romanticized notions allowed the promotion of Nan Tien Temple as an item of curiosity, a carnivalesque leisure space of ritual inversion from the dominant authorized culture. Local politicians' discourse surrounding Buddhism was entrenched in positive exotic associations. Portrayed in this way, Nan Tien Temple belonged in Wollongong as a mechanism to culturally enrich the city, although the temple is socially constructed as an object from elsewhere, from a culture portrayed as static and traditional. Cultural difference understood in this way framed the temple as part of Australia's multicultural selection box of costumes, dances and foods. Consequently, the local citizenship role for Buddhists was one in which they could be either displayed and marketed as a site of spectacle to potential tourists or paraded through the streets of Wollongong during special multicultural events, such as 'Viva la Gong'. In this role, while communicating a

positive portrayal of otherness, popular beliefs reinforced those essential qualities differentiating groups of Australians. In 2009 economic discourses continue to frame Buddhism in the Illawarra. Plans by the Fo Kuang Shan to build the Nan Tien Institute, adjacent to Nan Tien Temple, were welcomed primarily in economic terms. Indeed, the 'blessing' offered by the Nan Tien Institute was principally framed by the *Illawarra Mercury* in terms of 'a road to economic prosperity' and as broadening 'the regional economy with obvious plug-in advantages for the education, health and tourism sectors' (*Illawarra Mercury* 2009: 4).

From an examination of the debates surrounding Buddhism in the Illawarra an urgent research agenda for Bible scholars and the laity in Australia is a renewed commitment to multicultural discourses framed by social justice and the attendant acknowledgment of the integrity of all religions. Equivalence of faiths has yet to be attained. Anderson (2000: 388) charted some signposts that may help the laity to think postnationally, recasting the multicultural ideal by invoking a notion of 'rights to belong'.

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3 Sydney, a city growing within

The establishment of Buddhist centres in Western Sydney

John Skennar

Changing the established physical face and land use characteristics of the urban environment is always challenging, even more so when one of the agents of change is a less understood spiritual practice such as Buddhism. Buddhist communities in Western Sydney continue to struggle with unfamiliar regulations and, in some cases, local hostility to their presence. Planning law and protocols can seem static, and even abstract, in contemporary multicultural society where existing instruments are held rigidly over the communities that they are intended to serve. More supportive approaches to consideration and assessment of the cultural issues of land use and urban and architectural design are required and these need to play a more central role in regional and local area planning. Buddhist centres in Western Sydney play a role in securing the social and cultural sustainability of city growth and their establishment needs to be supported.

Accommodating growth and wellbeing within a changing city

Sydney continues to grow at a rate of about 34,000 people per year. The New South Wales (NSW) Government's Metropolitan Strategy indicates that 70 per cent of those people will be accommodated within the existing fabric of the city and 30 per cent will be in new greenfield locations (Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources 2004). This means that in parts of the city, existing low density suburban neighbourhoods, town centres, road and transport corridors will change their existing built form and become more urban in character, with higher density and more integrated living, working, recreational and cultural environments.

Historically, Greater Western Sydney post-European settlement has been a collection of townships dotted around the Cumberland Plain, each with its own character and identity. The suburbs have now expanded to fill the gaps and the communities that live in these places have undergone remarkable change as well. In Australia, 84 per cent of people born overseas, live in Sydney. They comprise a population of 1.2 million people in a city of 4 million. In addition, 52 per cent of Sydneysiders are either migrants or children of migrants. In NSW, 2.2 per cent of the population is Buddhist, and in the Fairfield Local Government Area (LGA),[1] 17 per cent of the population is Buddhist. In South Western Sydney, the changing cultural landscape is becoming more apparent.

New residents and communities bring with them cultural practices and ways of living that have the potential to maintain community identity, promote wellbeing and assist the settlement process. The continuing emergence of Buddhist centres is part of a change of the physical and cultural fabric of the city and presents an opportunity to consider the characteristics and merits of traditional land use practices. Urban environments characterized by more integrated land use, where housing, business, employment and cultural practices coincide, are heralded as the features of socially and environmentally sustainable cities. As a microcosm, temples operate as a type of integrated land use.

While city planning looks at broad targets for housing and infrastructure, the finer grain of local planning that considers and provides for local communities and diverse cultures struggles to be accommodated. The cost and availability of land in Sydney makes it more difficult for recently arrived communities, not only to afford housing, but also to establish meeting places that allow them to continue to practice their culture. Many communities also confront resistance to carrying out their cultural activities. Race and religion are sometimes attacked, when often it is the land use or building type that is the problem.

Sydney is growing within itself. This is a difficult process as suburban life makes way for a more urban one where new patterns of land use and diversity of built form and cultural practices continue to emerge. It is an interesting parallel that many people in western societies are looking to Buddhism and meditation practice as means of 'looking and growing within' in order to cope with the pressures of modern life.

While many lament the changes, there is also the potential for enrichment of the fabric and life of the reconstructed city. The growing pains are symptoms of change and within these difficulties are the ideas and building blocks of a rejuvenated urban environment. Change can be made easier with processes that acknowledge cultural planning, explain different cultural values, and establish careful land use and urban design that partners regulation with flexibility and a readiness to consider new and unfamiliar ideas.

Buddha in suburbia – emerging Buddhist centres

Buddhism is a growing spiritual practice in Australia with 2.6 per cent of the NSW population identified as Buddhist in the 2006 census. Migrants from a range of Asian countries, as well as growing numbers of western adherents, make up the number of growing Buddhist communities in Australia.

The establishment of Buddhist centres forms an important part of the settlement process for migrant communities as the temple or meditation centre becomes the focus of the community. Some temple communities have a longer history and have had support from their former home countries. Some of these groups have established temples in a traditional Asian style. Many groups, however, are made up of economically deprived refugee migrants who do not have the funds to build a temple, but have the need to carry out spiritual activity. House temples and meditation centres are a more affordable way of establishing meeting places for growing spiritual communities.

Temples are not churches but are a whole complex of different parts. They are living cultural centres that have many functions. Nuns and/or monks live within a temple complex and are on hand at all times. Temple activities include cultural ceremonies, chanting, meditation, retreats, festivals, spiritual guidance, education and social centre, offering food to monks and nuns and also a day centre for the elderly. The activities of Buddhist centres present a challenge to the normal activities of residential neighbourhoods and, indeed, can range across the categories of land use classification.

Wat Buddharangsee, a temple in the Thai forest tradition, was originally established in 1974 in Stanmore, an inner West Sydney suburb. However, the temple had difficulties establishing a Sunday school (local people objected to the noise of children for two to three hours on Sunday), so the Wat community decided to establish a new temple at Leumeah in 1984 on the southern fringe of metropolitan Sydney. The community purchased a large parcel of land in a semi-rural setting, not far from the headwaters of the Georges River. However, even here it was found to be very difficult to establish a temple and suit the planning regulations. It was acceptable to have a place of worship, but not an associated residence for monks (although space for a caretaker was acceptable). Zoning did not account for mixed use in the way temples operate. The planning issues were further affected in that the location was in a scenic protection area. Eventually the monks accepted the limitations of planning regulations and decided that the centre would operate as a residence for monks but not as a place of public worship. The monks also felt the need to step back from a traditional Thai architectural style, as they were concerned it might not get approval. 'If that fear was not there we may have done it better', said the abbot, Venerable Tan Chao Khun Vibunsilaporn. The beautiful grounds also include a stupa and small shrines within landscaped gardens. The NSW Heritage Office now recognizes Wat Buddharangsee as a heritage site.

Land use planning – the playing field

Spatial planning of cities influences how we live and use the city. Spatial conditions are regulated through planning instruments that nominate acceptable land uses and activities through the zoning of land. These conditions are set down in local and regional environmental plans, as well as state environmental planning policies and more detailed prescriptions are contained in development control plans. When considering cultural paradigms, it is worthwhile remembering that these instruments have been appropriated from colder climate town planning concepts. They are also historically linked to the Industrial Revolution and the resultant miserable urban townscapes that led to visions for a physically healthier way of life being championed. At the time, there was a move to leave behind the squalor of cramped inner city conditions. Separation of different types of land use was proposed, where previously industry and housing were often mixed.

In Australia, this approach to land use, combined with the rise in car use, has separated functions and established single interest precincts resulting in a lack

of variety of activity and building types, architectural style and neighbourhood character. There can be a visual blandness and a lack of activity that makes it difficult to orient oneself within such environments. Residential areas are separate from commercial precincts and distinct from industrial and so on. In recognition of the central importance of religious practice, however, places of public worship have traditionally been permitted in residential areas.

There is of course a pre-existing cultural context where there is a fashioned conception as to the activities and form of a place of public worship. It was not until 1998 that NSW planning law was amended so that the term 'places of public worship' became applicable to all religions instead of being restricted to Christian churches. Kevin Dunn refers to this 'terminology' and legislative issue in relation to the establishment of a mosque in the Bankstown Local Government Area[2] (Dunn 2004).

The settlement patterns and spatial representation of migrant communities within Sydney are pushing the boundaries of traditional neighbourhood activities, changing the face of commercial precincts and ways of doing business, and challenging the former role of a sleepy public domain. Different cultures are more visible to each other in the built environment and there are varying responses ranging from hostility to acceptance. Many groups are unfamiliar with local regulations and in dealing with regulatory authorities. Nuns and monks who are seeking to establish temples and meditation centres and come from backgrounds where there is strong support for temples find the new regulatory environment bewildering.

Neighbourhood amenity

Local government has the role as arbiter and regulator in the development process that accompanies the establishment of premises for different cultural groups. When considering changes to the fabric of the urban environment that development brings, councils generally consider maintaining the amenity of the area. Amenity encompasses a broad range of considerations that deal with bulk, scale height and character of the development, floor area, car parking, traffic impact, noise, architectural form, location and availability of public transport, minimum width block, site coverage and landscape.

The greatest concerns regarding the establishment of temples are the issues of traffic, parking and noise. Different levels of activity generate different responses. Smaller house temples that work with their neighbours in mitigating conflict may be less likely to attract disapproval. Larger temples that grow into regional centres that sometimes hundreds or occasionally thousands of people attend are not encouraged in residential areas. The scale of the centre needs to be compatible with the location. Councils encourage consideration of long-term growth prospects before choosing a site, but often the immediate need to establish a centre and the availability of affordable locations takes priority.

Councillor Thang Ngo from Fairfield City Council is someone who understands the issues regarding the establishment of temples when confronted with councils'

regulatory role. Speaking about the difficulties encountered by the Thien Hoa Nunnery in Cabramatta,[3] he said:

> [H]ouse temples are not purpose built, and it is a slow conversion process into a temple. The temples do good work in teaching and helping local people. The nuns are not used to regulation, and in Vietnam car parking is not an issue. There are complaints, Council then intervenes and even if usage conforms, there may be problems with building regulations. Here there is a problem with fire regulations and fines have been issued. It is a difficult situation, as council would be liable if they gave permission.
>
> (personal communication, Councillor Thang Ngo, Fairfield City Council 2005)

Councillor Ngo believes there are access and equity issues that need to be addressed:

> The application of chapter, verse and rule won't work. There needs to be a change to the Development Control Plan. However, it is difficult to conduct a public exhibition and debate in the current climate, and other issues have higher priority within council.

The temple is operating in a climate of uncertainty and the nuns have engaged urban planners to assist them in working with the council.

The Khmer Krom Temple in Rossmore,[4] subject of the SBS TV program, 'Over the Fence' (a program looking at the lives and cultures of migrant communities in suburbia), is another Buddhist community that has undergone significant struggle to develop a temple in the presence a hostile local community. The semi-rural site was chosen to avoid the conflict associated with traffic and parking in suburban areas. Council required the preparation of a masterplan and advised the community that it should consider and illustrate the scenario for long-term growth. The local response to the proposal was aggressive and damning, including references to 'frightening the horses and being an eyesore'. It is noteworthy that this is an environment where heavy haulage vehicles are parked and lie rusting in the landscape. The community has spent many tens of thousands of dollars on consultants and council fees. The temple currently remains in the original poultry cold storage facility on site and was forced to remove the 5 metre-high gold Buddha (the 'eyesore') from the site. Plans are being revised in light of local response, however, the temple's right to remain in that location was upheld. More careful planning and development processes that involve considered cross-cultural communication strategies could alleviate much of the struggle for all parties.

Venerable Thich Quan Ba from the Nguyen Thieu temple in Canley Vale,[5] in an interview with Dai Le on ABC Radio says:

> Many of these temples are ministering to refugee communities. Monks and nuns come with empty hands, they are not part of a hierarchical structure and there is no central fund. They are encouraged to be independent and go out in to the community so they start in a small way and look for supporters. It is not possible to afford to rent a place of assembly as well as run the house temple. It could take twenty years to purchase a bigger property. Society needs to be generous.
>
> (ABC Radio National 2005)

Venerable Thich Quan Ba considers the following qualities essential:

> [F]lexibility and understanding by Councils in their approach to dealing with temples. A temple is not a place of worship; the gathering is for very varied purposes. If parking and noise are acceptable to neighbours then he sees this as a private civil matter, rather than an issue of regulating religious communities. Council's planning role needs to evolve to develop new regulations. There are insufficient temples for the population and so finding suitable properties will be an ongoing problem. Many groups are mushrooming, as there is need for moral education given the crisis in secular society.
>
> (ABC Radio National 2005)

In 2004, Bankstown City Council released Development Control Plan No. 19 – Places of Public Worship. Bankstown has a much higher proportion of non-Christian adherents than Sydney does (19.1 per cent compared to 9.5 per cent), and a greater proportion of non-English speakers (46.2 per cent compared to 27.6 per cent). The research shows that the demand for buildings by non-Christian communities is likely to increase in the coming years as these communities currently have a disproportionately small number of buildings for the number of adherents: 'The implication is that Muslims and Buddhists tend to go outside Bankstown to worship or that their small numbers of places of worship each involve large numbers of people and associated traffic movement' (Development Control Plan No. 19). In planning for the likely growth of places of public worship and to accommodate these places in ways that mitigate conflict within, the Bankstown City Council has developed Development Control Plan No. 19 to establish a level playing field where all groups encounter consistent regulations. Of concern to council was the potential for decline in goodwill between cultures, where issues of race became confused with matters of land use and neighbourhood amenity. Additionally, council has decided not to rezone land with 'special uses', zoning as it becomes available for redevelopment, in order to maintain the availability of larger sites for non-residential or cultural uses.

Bankstown's Development Control Plan No. 19 considers and prescribes location, height, setbacks, site coverage, parking, traffic impact, noise, landscaping, operation of establishment, ancillary uses, services, food preparation, safety, security and accessibility, water conservation and energy efficiency. Significantly, the Development Control Plan limits the floor area of the assembly area in a residential zone 2(a), requires a minimum allotment size of 800 square metres and ties minimum parking provision to the size of the assembly area.

These requirements are intended to establish parity in regulating the establishment of places of public worship within residential neighbourhoods. Smaller house temples usually fall outside these regulations and can operate providing there are good relations with the neighbours. However, there can be problems for the house temples in regard to conforming to building regulations. Larger temples are encouraged to establish premises in industrial areas or business districts.

Creating territories of diversity

Temples and meditation centres vary from those that in character merge with their surroundings, to the magnificent and ornate traditional styles. These varying architectural characters are testimony to the varied circumstances of the organizations, their confidence and the possibilities of their locations. Some temples that are well placed and have larger land areas are able to develop a full-scale temple complex with monks' residence, community hall, shrine room, stupas, graceful gardens and onsite parking. Centres such as these in the suburbs of Bonnyrigg and Wetherill Park in the Fairfield LGA, have established buildings in traditional Asian style. They present a remarkable respite from the surrounding brick and tile houses and act as points of orientation in the suburban landscape.

At Bonnyrigg, there is a gathering of cultural centres, churches, temples, clubs, a mosque and a hardware megacentre around a district park at the town centre. The sites for these centres were made available in the latter part of the 1980s by the 'Land and Housing Corporation'. The central parkland at Bonnyrigg is currently being developed by Fairfield City Council as 'sites of contemplation', a meeting place in the public domain for the diverse cultures of the local area. Vietnamese, Cambodian and Lao temples are part of this gathering of places of worship. Fairfield Council is developing urban design and public domain strategies that will include visual arts and cultural activities in the public domain with representation of local cultures. The Lao temple, Wat Prayortkeo, has a 'good neighbourhood policy' where neighbours are invited for food and drink and visits for advice in times of trouble. The monks from the temple walk from Bonnyrigg to Cabramatta on a weekly basis on their alms round, which helps further familiarize locals with their presence. Fairfield Council recognizes the important role of good quality public domains in facilitating cross-cultural communication. Towards this end, council is also working towards the establishment of a cultural precinct in Cabramatta Town Centre, to be known as 'Cabramatta Common'. Bankstown City Council has played host to Vesak (the Buddha's birthday) celebrations in the civic mall at Bankstown. As the presence of cultural activity in the public domain becomes more popular, broader understanding of Buddhism may lessen the fear that often accompanies people's negative reactions.

More humble Buddhist centres, such as the house temple, are becoming more popular in ordinary suburban streets. These may not be places of worship in the sense of the larger temples, but are residences for monks or nuns who, as teachers, have developed a following, and where community members visit for meditation or pastoral care and where food is prepared and shared. Responses by neighbours and councils to these establishments vary from hostility to acceptance and this is where the real work of developing good neighbourhood relations leads to acceptance of cultural diversity.

Approaching change in culture and urban form

There is a growing awareness that the values that established the post-war Australian model of suburban life have limitations. There is recognition that growth determined purely by market forces (based on limited needs assessment and mainly driven by supply of a housing commodity) produces urban environments lacking in variety, interest and vitality. We are, perhaps, at a point where it is possible to acknowledge cultural diversity and consider better informed and more positive approaches to change.

Integrated neighbourhood scenarios require a willingness and ability to accommodate a more public life, accept diversity and its challenges and to be open to new customs. It is important to recognize when positive drivers for change are in place and support these. The re-patterning of a city growing within itself needs to be informed by local needs and with local participation. An assessment of urban amenity that is limited to maintaining a suburban status quo or simply adopting a developer driven model may limit the potential for change that recognizes local needs and achieves health and wellbeing outcomes related to improved social connections and access to spiritual practice in daily life.

In Australia, many people struggle with a suburban life that lacks personal engagement: empty streets, empty parks, quiet strip centres, fewer meeting places and people living alone. Australia has so much space, so few people and so much isolation. The development of Buddhist temples in suburban Sydney is part of a cultural change that is turning around that emptiness for people that are familiar with and enjoy more engaging urban environments. In a city with the cultural diversity of Sydney, healthy growth depends on acknowledgment and spatial representation of cultural diversity. For communities, developers and agencies that regulate change, this means greater recognition and strengthened support of the cultural dimension of growth.

Notes

1 Fairfield LGA is 32 kilometres southwest of Sydney Central Business District. There are 133 different nationalities living there and 75 per cent of residents have a background language other than English.
2 Bankstown LGA is in South Western Sydney 15 kilometres from Sydney CBD and is comprised of people from 60 different language groups.
3 Cabramatta, a suburb in the Fairfield LGA, is a major centre for the Vietnamese diaspora in Australia.
4 Rossmore is a semi-rural area on the edge of the Liverpool LGA in South Western Sydney. It contains market gardens and residential properties on multi-hectare blocks.
5 Canley Vale is a suburb in the Fairfield LGA where there are several 'house temples'.

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4 Adaptation and continuity in Cambodian Buddhist temples

Implications for service delivery and community development

Shiva Vasi

> We live in a secular society and for most of us it is difficult, if not impossible, to grasp the significance of the Buddhist temple for the Cambodian community. Most Cambodians come from a background of trauma, struggle, pain and heartache. Soon after they arrive in Australia, they put their money, if they have any, towards building and supporting a temple; often this is what they give their money to, even before they build their own homes. The temple is not only a place of worship, but also a community centre and a place of identity amidst their transition to a new culture, a sense of who they are when they are in a strange place. The temple is the basis of their spiritual understanding of themselves, their identity and the source of strength that they gain from being together.
>
> (Helen Heath, President, Interfaith Network, City of Greater Dandenong, Melbourne)

In Australia, wherever Cambodians have settled in large numbers, they have successfully established Buddhist temples and have developed community networks around them. The temples support, and are supported by, these communities. As well as their role as religious and spiritual institutions, the Buddhist temples also actively support the social welfare, and settlement-related needs of their communities. They thus play a pivotal role in enhancing the overall well being of Cambodian Buddhists. This chapter is based on the data from a qualitative and participatory research project, which was carried out by the author in 2006–2007. The aim of the project was to identify the key well being needs of the Cambodian Buddhist community in Victoria. The research involved extensive consultation with service providers, in-depth interviews and focus group discussion with monks, community leaders and community members. I will draw on the findings of the study to further examine the contribution of the Buddhist temples in the area of refugee resettlement and welfare and their role in the maintenance of the traditional Cambodian Buddhist culture and identity. Cambodian Buddhist temples in Australia are valuable cultural capital, which must be utilized in developing culturally competent and sustainable settlement and welfare services for the Cambodian community.

Cambodian Buddhist community in Australia

Studies into the historical development of Buddhism in Australia have identified the arrival of Asian Buddhist migrants and Indochinese refugees as a milestone in the process (Croucher 1989; Spuler 2000). The arrival of large number of Buddhists from Asia was partly due to the end of the 'White Australia Policy' in 1973, as well as the arrival of Indochinese refugees from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. This not only increased the number of Buddhists, but it also altered the ethno-cultural makeup of Buddhism in Australia. As soon as members of these communities had the resources, they established Buddhist temples that generally catered for both their cultural and religious needs. These temples grew and were further consolidated with the arrival of monks and nuns from their homelands.

The number and characteristics of Cambodians in Australia has changed with the arrival of successive waves under different migration programs. There are three broad stages of Cambodian migration to Australia. These three waves correspond to events in Cambodia and international and national factors influencing resettlement policies. The first wave followed Cambodia's independence from French rule in 1953. Following this, Cambodian students arrived in Australia in small numbers. From the late 1960s and throughout the early 1970s, larger groups of students arrived under the auspices of the Commonwealth Colombo Plan. By June 1976 the Cambodian community in Australia numbered 496.

The second wave arrived under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program. In the period 1975–86 Australia admitted 12,922 Cambodians or 6 per cent of the total global intake of Cambodian refugees. By the time the Khmer Rouge was overthrown in January 1979, over 1.5 million or 21 per cent of the population in Cambodia had been murdered or had died from starvation and disease, hundreds of thousands were internally displaced and over 200,000 refugees fled to camps in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. The majority of these had lost family members through death or separation, experienced prolonged political, social, economic upheavals and had witnessed the severe disruption of the normal structures of their traditional lives, leading to the general collapse of their society. The largest number of Cambodian refugees, 3996 people (25 per cent of total Cambodian refugees admitted to Australia), arrived in 1983. Following this, there was a steady decline in the number of Cambodians arriving in Australia under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program. Between 1989 and 1991 only 315 asylum seekers arrived in Australia from Cambodia.

The third wave consisted almost entirely of those entering under the Family Migration stream. Of the 1141 Cambodians who arrived in Victoria between 1996–2004, 80 per cent came under the Family Migration stream, 8 per cent arrived under the Humanitarian Program, 2 per cent under the Skilled Migration Program and 10 per cent were classified in other categories. (Yim 2001: 38–40; Atwell, Correa-Velez, Gifford and West 2006: 133). The community continues to grow at a slow, but steady rate: between 2001 and 2006 the Cambodian population in Australia grew from 22,979 to 24,528 (a 6.7 per cent increase). In the same period there was a 9 per cent increase in the number of Cambodians in Victoria from 9003 to 9790.

In Australia, as in Cambodia, the majority of Cambodians are Theravada Buddhists. According to the 2006 Census of Population and Housing there are 24,528 Cambodian born living in Australia; of these 19,582 or 79.8 per cent are Buddhists. The majority of Cambodian born live in New South Wales (total 9972, Buddhists 8206) followed by Victoria (total 9790, Buddhists 7772).

Theravada Buddhism and the Buddhist temples continue to maintain their traditional significance for Cambodian Buddhists in Australia. Traditionally, the doctrines of Theravada Buddhism are seamlessly woven into the worldview of Cambodians and have a profound influence on all aspects of life. Buddhist temples play a key role in this process; they not only disseminate the teachings of Buddhism, but also act as education centres and occupy a unique position in the transmission of Cambodian culture and values. In addition, Buddhist monks in Cambodia traditionally offer a range of community-based, human services to the community. In contemporary Cambodia, the traditional role of temples has been harnessed to address new challenges; for example, Buddhist monks and nuns are actively involved in the area of HIV/AIDS education, prevention and care.[1]

The data from the case study for this chapter offer insights into the role and significance of Buddhism and Buddhist temples for Cambodians. This is not a comprehensive study of Cambodian Buddhist communities in Australia. However, given the demographics characteristics of the Cambodian community in Australia, the study provides a window on the role of Buddhist temples in aiding settlement. The findings are also consistent with those of other studies of Indochinese refugees in Canada and the United States, where they have settled in large numbers.

There are three Cambodian Buddhist temples in Victoria: the Cambodian Buddhist Association of Victoria – Wat Buddharangsi, the Cambodian Temple of Victoria – Wat Dhammaram, and the Khmer Buddhist Centre of Victoria – Wat Khmer Melbourne. Each of the temples houses a community of resident and visiting monks. There is also a small community of resident nuns at Wat Buddharangsi, which has the largest membership and the best developed infrastructure of the three temples. At each of these Buddhist temples, there is a relationship of mutual support between the community of monks and nuns and the community members. The temples have been erected through community donations over long periods of time; the community also supports the daily needs of the monks. The temples meet the religious and cultural needs of their communities and offer support and practical help in a wide range of areas. The active role of these temples as religious and community support centres is reflected in their organizational structures. For example, two executive committees manage Wat Buddharangsi temple. One of the committees is a religious body and deals with the religious needs of the community. The second committee is responsible for community development and deals with youth issues, aged care, social welfare, culture and language and fundraising activities to support and further develop the temple's programs and infrastructure.

The two key contributions of Cambodian Buddhist temples to their communities consist of:

1 managing the dynamics of identity maintenance, on the one hand, and social integration and participation, on the other
2 and addressing the settlement and welfare needs of their communities.

Balancing integration with identity maintenance

A challenge faced by ethnic communities in general is the preservation of their cultural identity and integrity, and at the same time finding ways of integrating into the broader host society. The Cambodian Buddhist temples have contributed to the accomplishment of this challenging task. They offer regular meditation classes, meditation retreats and dharma classes. Khmer language classes and cultural activities such as art, music, folk dance and religious festivals are important means of fostering positive Cambodian cultural attributes. These activities are critical in keeping Buddhism and Khmer language and culture alive, especially for second- and third-generation Cambodians. Furthermore, in the midst of cultural transition and resettlement, the temples are one of the few institutions that have remained constant and lend stability to the Cambodian community, by providing a thread of religious and cultural continuity. For many Cambodians the establishment of temples and the daily support of the monastic community is an integral part of maintaining their ethno-religious identity as Cambodian Buddhists in Australia.

Cambodian Buddhist temples play a significant role in promoting positive relations between Cambodians and the wider Victorian community, by emphasizing the importance of achieving a balance between the maintenance of the Cambodian tradition and adaptation to Australian culture. For example, they encourage the maintenance of customs such as respect for the elderly. At the same time they actively promote greater inclusion of the younger generation; for example, through placing them in positions of responsibility in the temples that are traditionally reserved for the older, male community members. In their effort to bring about greater integration of the Cambodian community into the wider society, Buddhist temples have been actively collaborating with organizations such as the Interfaith Network and the local schools. Examples of this collaboration include meditation classes and talks on Buddhism offered by monks at the local schools and offering tours of the Buddhist temples to students and specialist groups, such as teachers and pastoral care workers. These activities have promoted mutual trust and cross-cultural understanding between Cambodians and the broader community.

Meeting settlement and welfare needs in communities

Buddhist temples continue to benefit both the old and the new generations in their communities. The greatest contribution of the Cambodian Buddhist temples in the area of welfare has been to address the needs of two vulnerable groups, namely the elderly and the youth (Van Reyk 2005; Atwell et al. 2006; Vasi 2008).

Isolation and mental health issues are the two key barriers to well being of elderly Cambodians (Vasi 2008). The Buddhist temples are in a position to effectively address the problem of isolation among the elderly, by offering them the

opportunity to leave their isolated home lives and socialize with other community members. Low levels of English language skills and dependency on family members for transport contribute to the isolation of the elderly. Many of the elderly lack the confidence to use public transport or even to leave home on their own. Cambodian elderly lack senior citizens' groups to provide them with social support. The concept of recreational activities, such as sports, is an alien concept to many of them. For nearly all of the elderly Cambodians the temple is the only recreational and social outlet.

The majority of older Cambodians arrived in Australia as refugees in the 1980s when they were in their 30s and 40s. Many have experienced multiple traumas; they have endured the brutalities of the Khmer Rouge regime and many have also spent time at refugee camps prior to their settlement in Australia. Migration stressors and isolation often exacerbate the impact of the past traumas. Together, these are very likely to have led to ongoing mental health concerns.

However, they face a range of barriers in accessing and using the specialist mental health services. To begin with there is a lack of awareness of the available mainstream mental health services. Low rates of literacy in Khmer make printed information inaccessible to many. Even when there is an awareness of the existing services, the elderly experience significant cultural and linguistic barriers to using them. The experience of trauma is mediated through religious and cultural institutions, beliefs and practices. The outcome of traumatic experience depends on a wide range of cultural beliefs about trauma, loss and adversity in general. An awareness of these cultural categories is particularly relevant to the treatment of mental health concerns. In Cambodian culture, Buddhist interpretive frameworks are adopted to understand and address suffering in general. Therefore, individuals often deal with mental anguish by going to the Buddhist temples to pray, to make offerings to gain merit to avoid similar misfortune in the next life or to seek help from the monks (Watters 2001).

Counselling offers a good example of a conventional method of dealing with psychological trauma, which may not be culturally appropriate in addressing the mental health needs of elderly Cambodians. The concept of counselling is alien to many older Cambodians; hence they are generally reluctant to seek counselling to deal with mental health issues. However, in dealing with these concerns, they willingly seek the advice of the Buddhist monks. For many Cambodians, speaking to the Buddhist monks represents the cultural equivalent of receiving counselling. However, it is not advocated that traditional practices and the Buddhist monks' advice should replace the specialist mental health services. Nonetheless, resources such as the temple community and the monks are valuable cultural capital, which should be utilized *in conjunction* with mainstream services to improve the well being of the elderly Cambodians. The importance of culturally appropriate social outlets has been recognized as an important well being factor for elderly refugees in general:

> Being able to leave the home and socialize with people who share their language, culture and experiences plays a huge role in enabling older refugees

> to re-establish and preserve a sense of identity and belonging, and help the process of overcoming trauma and the disorientation of resettlement. Bringing groups of older refugees together with a specific purpose can also help overcome their feelings of uselessness and loss of status, and encourage recognition and respect from the community. Any gathering of older refugees is also an opportunity to inform them of services that may be relevant and which they may not otherwise have encountered.
>
> (Atwell et al. 2006: 52)

Cambodian Buddhist temples actively contribute to the welfare of Cambodian youth. Two key impediments to the well being of Cambodian youth are: low educational attainment and intergenerational conflict within families (Vasi 2008).

According to the 2006 Census data, compared with other Victorians, Cambodians have lower educational attainments. In 2006 23 per cent of Cambodian youth left school before year 11, compared with 13 per cent of total youth for Victoria. The 2006 Census data reflected a similar gap in the post-secondary education path of Cambodians. Of the total of 9487 Cambodians over 15 years of age, 1636 (13.8 per cent) had post-secondary qualifications, compared with 37.8 per cent for total Victoria. In addition, qualification levels of Cambodians with post-secondary education were lower compared with total Victoria: 0.8 per cent held postgraduate degrees (compared with 2.7 per cent for total Victoria); 0.4 per cent had graduate diplomas and graduate certificates (compared with 1.9 per cent for total Victoria); 7.5 per cent held bachelor degrees (compared with 12.6 per cent for total Victoria); and 8.6 per cent held diplomas, etc. (compared with 20.6 per cent for total Victoria).

The reasons for lower educational attainments of Cambodians are multilayered and complex: lack of positive role models and ongoing mentoring programs are two important factors (Henderson 1993; Van Reyk 2005; Vasi 2008). Identity formation in adolescents involves modelling oneself on significant others, such as parents, teachers and peers and integrating their values. Role models can have a positive influence on the educational outcomes by providing young people with a vision of them that they can strive to achieve (MacCallum and Beltman 2002). Buddhist temples play an active role in offering positive role models to the youth, especially through study programs. In the past (depending on the availability of funds), temples have invited members of the Cambodian Federation of Tertiary Students to offer academic help to students in their final years of high school. Programs such as this, in addition to providing valuable academic coaching, also expose the participants to positive role models, namely Cambodian youth who have made a successful transition to tertiary institutions.

Lack of communication within Cambodian families is a main contributor to intergenerational conflict and has a detrimental impact on Cambodian youth. In most families, the barriers to effective communication are the cultural gap between parents and their children and a lack of proficiency in a common language because of parents' limited English and the children's low levels of Khmer language skills (Henderson 1993; Van Reyk 2005; Vasi 2008).

The temples recognize the importance of communication between members of the 'old' and the 'new' generations. In an attempt to reduce the communication gap and to keep Khmer language and culture alive in the new generation of Cambodians, Wat Buddharangsi established the Khmer Language School in 1988. Approximately 120 children and youth attend Khmer language and culture classes on weekends. The temples also play a valuable role in strengthening the bonds within the families through ongoing cultural and religious programs and festivals, which appeal to and attract both the new and the old generation. These events are very popular; for example, the Cambodian New Year celebrations at the temples are attended by as many as 10,000 community members. The monks also support the families through direct intervention, advice and counselling.

In addition to supporting the youth and the elderly, the monks and the senior temple leaders are also the first point of contact in diverse areas of need, in preference to the mainstream services (Henderson 1993; Van Reyk 2005; Vasi 2008). The lack of awareness of services and programs and language and cultural barriers are the main reasons for reliance on temples for help and referral. In order to appreciate the significance of cultural barriers in accessing the mainstream services, one must take into consideration the fact that many Cambodians lack familiarity with Australian culture, institutions and the social system. They face massive psychological, social, cultural, economic and political challenges in the transition from their mainly rural communities into the complex, industrialized and highly urban way of life in Australia. Low levels of English language skills, as well as literacy in Khmer, compound these difficulties. The current models of service delivery, by way of contrast, emphasize mainstreaming of social services in general. The underpinning assumption with respect to this approach is that after the initial period of settlement, the mainstream organizations can adequately meet the needs of the ethnic communities.[2]

The Cambodian Buddhist temples are actively involved in supporting the religious, cultural and welfare needs of their communities. This has important consequences for strengthening Cambodian families, the Cambodian community and improving the social fabric of the Victorian community as a whole. The temples provide a focal point for a wide variety of interactions with potentially significant consequences that impact the quality of life for community members and the families. The temples offer a relaxed and informal place where the community can meet, interact socially and engage in a variety of activities. The temples also offer community projects that bring the individuals and families together around common activities, where mutual dependence of members is increased through accomplishing a common goal, and community bonds are strengthened in the process. Therefore, it is accurate to say that in the Cambodian community, in addition to their religious significance, the Buddhist temples are also the centres of the community life. In terms of Western models of community development the Buddhist temples in the Cambodian community may be described as a 'community centre' and thus an important tenet of community development (Kenny 1994). It is important to note that the temples' approach to community support is far removed from the conventional bureaucratic model of social services in the West. They are

firmly based on the metaphysical foundations of Theravada Buddhism, and are perceived as the natural extension of its ethical principles.

The study has broader implications for some aspects of the transplantation and adaptation of Buddhism in the West. Previous studies of Indochinese refugee communities in the main countries of resettlement (Australia, Canada and the United States), have documented the active role of the Buddhist temples in aiding the resettlement process (Burwill, Hill and Van Wicklin 1986; Dorais 1989; McLellan 1992, 1999; Smith-Hefner 1999; Chan 2004; Vasi 2005). The contribution of Buddhist temples in areas such as the education of adults, education of children, hospice and hospital work, alcohol and drug rehabilitation programs and refugee resettlement, is located within the broader concept of engaged Buddhism. The term 'service-based Buddhism' has been coined to describe more specifically this aspect of socially engaged Buddhism (Queen 2000: 10). Social justice activism is argued to be an integral part of Buddhist teachings and not a by-product of its transplantation to the West: a contribution of Western humanism to Buddhist ethics. On the contrary, the very essence of Buddhism involves a commitment to social engagement (Rahula 1974, 1988; Macy 1988; Sivaraksa 1988; Nhat Hanh 1996; Hunt-Perry and Fine 2000; Sherwood 2001, 2003). The findings of this small-scale study of the Cambodian Buddhist community in Victoria add further support to this position. This study demonstrates a strong contiguity between the traditional-religious role of temples and their involvement in the area of social welfare. The findings also portray Cambodian Buddhist temples as vital hubs of religious activities, welfare services, as well as agents of cultural continuity in their communities. Far from being anachronistic or declining institutions, they remain relevant to the older first-generation, as well as the younger, second- and third-generation Cambodians.

Conclusion

There is a need to recognize, re-evaluate, and utilize Buddhist temples as platforms for the delivery of sustainable and culturally competent services and programs in a wide range of areas. There is a dire need to enhance the capacity of the temples to respond more effectively to the settlement and welfare needs of their communities. Currently, Cambodian Buddhist temples do not have the resources to cope with the demand that are placed on them. The monks and members of the management committees of the Buddhist temples offer services that go well beyond the scope of their formal roles and duties. This often puts additional burden on their already overstretched resource. In addition, the monks and temple leaders lack the required skills and expertise to respond appropriately to some of the problems with which they are presented. There is a need to improve resources within the temples to optimize their potential in aiding their communities.

The findings of this case study offer a lens for examining the dynamics of adaptation: the continuation of the traditional roles of temples, as well as their transformation in response to the demands of a new sociocultural environment. Buddhist temples have traditionally occupied a unique role in Cambodia, not only

as religious and education centres which transmit Cambodian Buddhist culture and values, but also as institutions which integrate a wide range of community-based welfare services. The findings indicate that, as they are taking root in Australia, the Cambodian Buddhist temples are engaged in transmitting Buddhism, the Cambodian culture and responding to settlement-related challenges in a wide range of areas. This involves the maintenance, extension and modification of the temples' traditional roles. Far from being extant institutions, the Cambodian Buddhist temples in Australia have emerged as vibrant religious and community support centres.

Notes

1 Evidence suggests that in communities where literacy levels are low, people are more likely to accept information passed on by word of mouth, particularly when recommended by prominent members of the community such as monks. In Cambodia, where over 90 per cent of the population is Buddhist, Buddhist monks are held in high regard, not only as religious leaders but for their traditional role of helping those most in need. Non-government organizations such as UNICEF and Salvation Centre Cambodia have acknowledged the role of Buddhist monks and nuns as effective educators. They have been collaborating with Buddhist monks and nuns to implement large-scale HIV/AIDS prevention, care, support and advocacy initiatives at the community level. In Cambodia, Buddhist monks play an important role in decreasing stigma and discrimination against families living with HIV/AIDS and are at the forefront of HIV awareness.

2 Despite clear policy guidelines dictated by the Australian Government's Access and Equity strategy, there are serious concerns about the Cambodians' low levels of awareness of social services and the lower rates of services uptake relative to their needs. The barriers to effective service use in the Cambodian community have been documents by previous studies, which have suggested the implementation of the following strategies for successful service delivery: incorporation of bilingual service providers in key areas of need, linking funding to levels of service use, partnership between mainstream and Khmer ethno-specific service providers and community education campaigns.

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Part II

The Buddhist community

1 Adaptations and challenges

1 Transformations of insight

Patrick Kearney

I don't trust my inner feelings
Inner feelings come and go.
(Leonard Cohen 2001)

We know where we are only when we understand how we got here. As a teacher and student within the contemporary insight movement, my understanding of this movement, and of my own place within it, emerges from a history. So I begin this chapter with the story of my lineage, that of Mahasi Sayadaw and of the modern insight movement of Burma. Then I look at the similarities and differences between the modern insight movement in Australia and in Burma and, through this analysis. locate my own place as a teacher within the insight movement.

The Burmese insight movement represents a transition from tradition to modernity, through its empowerment of the laity and its reorganization of meditation practice. It can be seen as an attempt to democratize enlightenment itself. This movement began in the mid-nineteenth century in the royal court of Mandalay, stimulated by the twin traumas of military defeat and colonial occupation. In 1911 Mingun Sayadaw (1869–1954) opened the first Burmese meditation centre devoted to the teaching and practice of vipassana (insight) meditation for laity as well as monks and nuns (Houtman 1999: 7–8). Venerable U Sobhana, later known as Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–1982), went there for training in 1932 (Silanandabhivumsa 1982: 35–41). In 1947 Mahasi Sayadaw was appointed the head monk (*ovadacariya sayadaw*) of a new meditation centre in Rangoon, the Mahasi Thatana Yeiktha, designed to promote the practice of vipassana meditation both nationally and internationally.

The Mahasi Thatana Yeiktha is owned and operated by the Buddha Sasana Nuggaha Apwe (BSNA). The BSNA is an example of a *kopaka apwe* (guardian association), a new kind of lay Buddhist organization. These lay associations operate the new meditation centres, which, unlike traditional forest monasteries controlled by monastics, are predominantly lay and urban (Jordt 2007: 26–7). Through them, the laity have become regulators of the sangha (community of ordained monastics), a role that in traditional Burma was reserved for the king. Mahasi Sayadaw, for example, was able to function as the head of the centre

named after him only because he had been appointed by, and retained the confidence of, the BSNA. One of his successors, Panditarama Sayadaw, left the Mahasi Thatana Yeiktha after difficulties with the BSNA and went on to found his own centres (Jordt 2007: 226).[1]

Mahasi Sayadaw brought meditation practice to a mass following by systematizing both its practice and its teaching. Any person with normal physical and mental health can expect to succeed in this previously esoteric activity by following a standardized technique. The teaching of meditation was also systematized, to the extent that ordinary individuals who cannot demonstrate any unusual powers or charisma, but who have been appropriately trained, can transmit vipassana practice (Jordt 2007: 31–2). Meditation practice has become democratized, in that it is now available to the laity to a degree unknown in traditional Buddhism and internationalized, in that the same method can be applied across cultures.

Houtman (n.d.: 15–16) lists a number of ways in which practitioners in the modern Burmese vipassana movement understand Buddhism. There are interesting parallels with the insight movement in contemporary Australia. The following lists Houtman's observations and a comparison with my own regarding the Australian situation:

- Burmese vipassana practitioners, according to Houtman, distinguish between an inherited customary Buddhism and an authentic Buddhism reconstructed from authoritative texts and experienced individually through meditation. I find a correspondence in the Australian insight movement to the distinction made between an Asian Buddhism of ethnic custom and a western Buddhism found in meditation practices based on a return to the original teachings of the Buddha.
- Burmese vipassana practitioners value 'practice' (*patipatti*) and its result, 'penetration' (*pativedha*), over 'scriptural learning' (*pariyatti*). I find this parallels the emphasis among Australian insight practitioners on the importance of practice over study.
- Burmese vipassana practitioners claim membership, through their practice, of the 'sangha of ultimate truth' (*paramattha sangha*) as distinct from the 'sangha of conventional truth' (*sammuti sangha*), limited to formally ordained monastics. This suggests to me the way in which lay practitioners in the Australian insight movement have appropriated the term 'sangha' for themselves, often dismissing the ordained sangha as irrelevant or even suggesting that traditional monasticism is morally inferior to modern western forms of lay association (Bubna-Litic and Higgins 2007).
- Burmese vipassana practitioners emphasize 'meditation' (*bhavana*) over other forms of Buddhist action such as 'charity' (*dana*) and 'morality' (*sila*). I feel this corresponds to the centrality of meditation practice in the Australian insight movement, which appeals to the efficacy of meditation practice for improving one's quality of life rather than the cultivation of traditional Buddhist virtues.
- Finally, Burmese vipassana practitioners emphasize 'insight' (vipassana) meditation as the ideal type of meditative technique, as opposed to mere 'concentration' (*samatha*) meditation, and regard only the former as unique to Buddhism. Similarly, I have observed that members of the Australian insight movement regard 'insight' as their central value, and find it located within a specific approach to meditation practice, sometimes supplemented by other practices such as the sublime states (*brahma viharas*) or psychotherapy.

While the Australian insight movement has inherited the concerns of its Burmese predecessor, we also find notable differences. In Burma, for example, the depth and ubiquity of Theravada Buddhism creates a context within which the more specialized insight movement finds its specific place, while in Australia the absence of any indigenous Buddhist tradition has resulted in the insight movement largely drawing away from its Theravada origins, seeing itself as constituting its own 'insight tradition' (Bubna-Litic and Higgins 2007: 157–8).

These cultural differences are reflected in the way in which insight itself is understood. In the Burmese vipassana movement, 'insight', or 'insight knowledge', translates the Pali word *nana*, based on the root *na*, 'to know' or 'to understand'. For the Buddha and the modern Theravada, *nana* refers to an understanding of the three universal characteristics of *anicca* (impermanence or change), *dukkha* (suffering or unsatisfactoriness) and *anatta* (not-self). Consequently, within the Theravada tradition these three words – *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* – are loaded with meaning.

The word, 'impermanence', for example, indicates the discovery of a world in which clinging becomes pointless, as anything we cling to, no matter how loved or hated, vanishes. When nothing can be relied on to remain, Leonard Cohen's suspicion of his 'inner feelings', and his sense of inhabiting a world no longer defined by them, make a great deal of sense. The world becomes mysteriously open, no longer restricted to the narrow confines of the self and its habitual obsessions, a place where anything can happen because nothing is entirely reliable. Here we find a new sense of reality joined to an appreciation of the beauty and poignancy revealed by the inherent fragility of things. In contrast to the depth of meaning of impermanence felt by Theravada Buddhists, Australian insight practitioners may find little meaning in the word and certainly not enough to move them to a new understanding of the world.

'Insight', in the Australian insight movement, is a vague concept. Untouched by classical Theravada thought, insight practitioners tend to regard insight to refer to any experience that sheds light on one's life, and in particular any understanding of one's own psychological processes. What is important for the idea of insight is the personal meaning of any given experience and so its felt potential for influencing one's way of life. Whether or not an experience fits within a classical Buddhist context is, for the most part, unknown to, and irrelevant for, the practitioner. This is a pragmatic, secular view of insight, which makes the withdrawal from the Theravada tradition, with its religious and cosmological concerns, seem entirely natural.

How insight is understood affects how insight meditation is taught. In the Theravada, the three characteristics are subdivided into 16 *nanas*, or 'insight

knowledges', first analysed in the Visuddhimagga (*Path of Purification*), a fifth-century AD teachers' manual written for the monks of the Mahavihara of Anuradhapura, then capital of Sri Lanka.[2] Mahasi Sayadaw designed his method of insight meditation to guide the practitioner through these 16 *nanas*, culminating in *magga-phala nana*, or *nibbana* as directly encountered.[3] This experience turns the practitioner from an ordinary person (*puthujjana*) to a stream enterer (*sotapanna*), one who, having entered the stream of dharma, will never again be born in any of the lower realms and will attain final awakening within seven lifetimes (Bodhi 2005: 373–5).

Mahasi Sayadaw and his disciples mapped the 'progress of insight'[4] by making precise records of the experiences of their students and correlating these to the literary descriptions of the *nanas*. The recorded experiences of many thousands of practitioners created a phenomenological database that allows even an inexperienced teacher to listen to a practitioner's report and, taking into account other factors such as the personality of the practitioner and her level of concentration (*samadhi*), locate her precisely within a specific *nana*. This, in turn, influences the instructions given to that particular person at that particular time (Jordt 2007: 66–9).

The emphasis here is not on what the meditation experience means to the practitioner, but the quality of their *awareness* of it (Jordt 2007: 73). This approach assumes a great deal of faith on the part of practitioners, that they will be willing to work extremely hard to go through a process that they may not understand, as well as the faith on the part of their teachers that the meaning of these experiences will be revealed naturally over time.

In Australia, most people begin their insight practice with no cultural background within which they can locate what they are doing and no prior commitment to Buddhism. In these circumstances, meaning becomes paramount, especially as the encounter with meditation practice is often part of a broader search for meaning in an apparently meaningless world. Practitioners want to understand what they are doing, and why, in terms already culturally familiar. Teachers are expected to provide that meaning. They have to introduce the cultural background to the method – in other words, basic Buddhism – as well as explain the three characteristics and their implications for the way in which we live.

This brings me to where I stand within the contemporary insight movement. Trained in Burma by Burmese teachers, I know that it is neither possible nor desirable to attempt a transplant of Burmese Buddhism. Yet I also know that the cultural strangeness of the dharma creates the temptation to domesticate it, by translating it into some familiar aspect of our own culture – for example, as a form of psychotherapy (see, for example, Epstein 1995) or secular humanism (see, for example, Batchelor 1997). How, then, can insight be taught in contemporary Australia in a way that is relevant to us but which allows students entry into the alien culture of Buddhism?

I seek a balance between the Burmese approach of insight as pure phenomenology and our intuitive sense of insight as meaning. Emphasizing the centrality of investigation as defining the nature of vipassana meditation, I seek to convey

its practice as an open enquiry into the human condition guided by the themes of the Buddha's teaching. How much of this teaching is relevant to our culture is something that will only be revealed over time – and I am speaking of centuries rather than of years.

I begin with the Buddha. My own commitment is to understand and communicate the Buddha's teaching, the 'root' (*mula*) of the Theravada – and every other – Buddhist tradition. I begin by conveying a meditation method that makes clear the fact of change. This is the Mahasi method of vipassana meditation, based on the practice of following the movement of awareness from primary to secondary object, and back again (see Sayadaw 1971). This cultivates what the Buddha calls the 'perception of impermanence' (*anicca-sanna*), the open door through which insight enters. This perception creates a space within which we can pull back from our habitual stickiness of personal involvement long enough to recognize and learn to inhabit a world no longer defined by our normal, taken-for-granted self-reference.

But it is clear to me that it is not enough just to teach and practise a meditation technique. As we learn new ways of perceiving ourselves and our world we need a new language within which they can be conceptualized. We need the language of the Buddha, which he carefully developed throughout the 45 years of his teaching career. This is the second aspect of my project of teaching insight – to make the Buddha's language my own and communicate it effectively to others, so that it can enter our own culture and become as natural to us as our own reflection in a mirror.

The Buddha provides a complete vocabulary of technical terms linked by their places within a system of lists (*matika*), which together create a network of meaning (Gethin 1992). These terms, and their locations within the lists, provide reference points that enable us to recognize specific experiences that we stumble into during the course of our practice – and to locate them in the broader network. An experience can be placed within a context that gives it meaning. In brief, we learn to read text and experience against one another. Gradually, we find ourselves seeing and inhabiting the same landscape as that mapped by the Buddha.

Notes

1 During the *vassa* (rains retreat) of 1987 I was a bhikkhu under U Pandita at Mahasi Thatana Yeiktha, and witnessed his attempt to change the way in which food was offered to the bhikkhus in the Yeiktha's dining hall. The Buddha Sasana Nuggaha Apwe ignored his advice and it became clear to his monastic students that a conflict had broken out between them.

2 See Bhikkhu Nanamoli (1975: ix–xxviii) for an introduction to and location of this text.

3 While the concept of *nibbana* is used in various ways, it is sometimes spoken of in the early tradition as a real existent that can be known by the mind. For a discussion, see Collins (1998: 163–77).

4 The title of a book in which Mahasi Sayadaw (1985) gives a summary of the 16 insight knowledges.

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2 Sōka Gakkai

Dialogue as the transformative expression of Buddhist humanism

Elizabeth Bowen

Sōka Gakkai International Australia is now lauded as a model among SGI organizations in that it has been able to embrace the multi-ethnicity of its membership, having created diversity in its leadership structure and a dialogical methodology to continuously evolve its expression in the community. Dialogue has been underlying the ways in which SGI has been transformed from its culturally specific Japanese heritage into a diverse community reflective of multicultural Australia. This is a personal observation of the evolution of SGI Australia's expression of Buddhist humanism in Australia over 25 years of my participation.

Kimie, a Japanese war bride introduced me to the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin as practised by Sōka Gakkai, over 25 years ago, in Tasmania. Although reputed for promoting material benefit, Sōka Gakkai's appeal for me lay in that it does not deny individual happiness but rather views it as inextricably linked with creating a peaceful society. Moreover, it seemed to me that the concept of human revolution or inner transformation, as a contemporary expression of enlightenment, gave rise to the limitless potential for self-development and a practical, achievable way to contribute to society.

In 1985, not long after being taught the basic practice of chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* (the daily recitation of the title of the Lotus Sutra), I moved to Sydney and participated in Nichiren Shoshu Sōka Gakkai activities. The community centre was a modest converted church in Arncliffe. Activities consisted of a monthly meeting to pray for world peace held there and district discussion meetings sparsely spread throughout Sydney. At that time, with approximately 600 members Australia wide, the organization reflected its Japanese heritage with relatively few local members. Throughout the 1980s the majority of leaders were Japanese despite steady growth in Australian membership.

My first experience of the cultural barriers was the mixture of mystical and doctrinal explanations of Buddhism where Japanese Buddhist terms were assumed vernacular – this was at times alienating. Long hours of prayer were conducted kneeling on the floor, rousing speeches were in broken English and people joined arms to sing (to my ears often militaristic sounding) songs of historic relevance to the Japanese Sōka Gakkai. Other Japanese cultural traditions were maintained such as taking shoes off before entering the *kaikan* (community centre). In spite of the numerical predominance of women and their greater efforts

in terms of propagation and caring for the membership, men tended to lead most meetings. Compelling aspects were the genuinely friendly, caring members and the vibrant sincerity of the Japanese pioneering women. With their limited English they encouraged Australian members, who often held idealized views of Buddhism and introduced the mentor and disciple relationship – a central underpinning of Nichiren Buddhism, Sōka Gakkai's heritage and successful expansion. Discussion meetings held in people's homes, although stilted by language barriers, formal agendas and the tendency to be presided over mostly by men, did, however, provide a sense of belonging. It was nevertheless a culture shock for a young western woman like me. Despite my initial hopes for life-transforming enlightenment, my perception was of a rather quaint community out of place in the cultural landscape of Australia of the 1980s.

Just when I began to think this was 'not for me', significance was placed on the study of SGI President Ikeda's work as conveying the universality of Nichiren Buddhism. This enabled young Australian members, including me, to gain deeper insight into the contemporary application of Buddhist teachings and practice. We learned to distinguish between cultural traditions and religious formalities and of Nichiren's reading of Shakyamuni's example as an empowering humanistic expression that could be emulated in daily living. Exploring the meaning of the Japanese Buddhist terms and greater in depth discussion on the philosophy enabled the application of Buddhism to have more relevance in Australia and move away from an organizational structure and activities that had often been copied from the Japanese experience. As younger members grew in their confidence, a perception that Japanese members automatically understood more about the practice and teachings was challenged, thus enabling local Australians to take up leadership roles. Confidence in a deeper understanding of the philosophy became the inspiration for a more relevant expression in activities within SGI Australia.

As Shakyamuni essentially proposed, enlightenment is an ever present potential that could be revealed by all people amid the realities of daily life. Nichiren, after extensive study of Shakyamuni's teachings and various Buddhist scholars' interpretations of them, reaffirmed this core message of the inherent dignity of all life. He encouraged individual practitioners that they could enact this belief and highlighted the behaviour of Shakyamuni as an example of compassion and wisdom expressed in actions made towards relieving suffering. Daisaku Ikeda's writings give contemporary expression to this lineage of Buddhist humanism. The Sōka Gakkai, through its lay activities, in particular its emphasis on discussion meetings, gave Nichiren Buddhism a practical expression, connecting working in the community for a peaceful society with inner transformation, that is, human revolution as coined by second Sōka Gakkai President Toda. However, while maintaining ties to the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, the Sōka Gakkai expanded extremely rapidly as a lay organization. Tensions developed between ideals of a contemporary humanistic approach to Buddhism versus emphasis on organizational structure, religiosity of the priesthood as well as Sōka Gakkai's (cultural) expression through its activities in the community as it established organizations in other countries.

Sōka Gakkai had reached eight million households in Japan when I joined the 600 membership of the Australian organization in the mid-1980s. The sheer magnitude of Sōka Gakkai's size begat a large bureaucracy with many characteristics of a Japanese corporation. Leadership was based on a cultural tradition of seniority (where new roles and positions needed to be created to allow for fresh leadership to take central roles) and was clearly patriarchal. Numerous special interest groups such as choirs and brass bands created an imposing image of grandeur for a fledgling Australian organization. Despite these challenges, the strength of Sōka Gakkai was positively attributed to the role of women, mainly home workers who conducted abundant activities during the day.

For me, patriarchy was and always has been the elephant in the room. Shakyamuni acknowledged equal potential for the enlightenment of women and men. Nichiren referred to his female disciples in honorific terms in an era when women were not given names and played no significant role in society. Daisaku Ikeda has promoted the twenty-first century as one where women will take centre stage. Japanese organizational culture is patriarchal and gender roles have been clearly delineated within the Sōka Gakkai. For Australian women – often combining work, family, SGI activities and education – one challenge has been to not make comparisons with a model set by their Japanese counterparts, who traditionally are not in paid employment and where men in central roles are supported by women who still take care of the majority of home duties. Although changes are occurring, the bureaucracy and organizational culture has lagged behind the grassroots movement in terms of providing leadership opportunities for women.

The need for adaptation to local cultures became apparent as Sōka Gakkai expanded from eastern to westernized cultures and Australia was no exception. As third president of Sōka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda embarked on extensive travel to establish international organizations; promoting the need to be aware of cultural differences and engage in dialogue rather than conducting overt propagation and refuting other religions. He challenged the tendency of homesick members of Japanese descent to idealize and therefore copy how activities were conducted in Japan. However, a learning curve ensued in interactions between the Sōka Gakkai, immigrant Japanese members who had trained and had expectations based on their experience of practising in Japan and a budding Australian home-grown membership.

During the late 1980s, incremental changes were made to the way in which members practised in Australia; such as chairs being purchased for the community centre (instead of kneeling in prayer) and there was no longer a requirement for shoes to be taken off before entering the main hall. Young Australian members began taking the lead in activities, women took the lead in prayer (traditionally always led by men) and discussion groups, while culture festivals, that were not considered so appropriate in the Australian context, were relegated to faded, pre-digital photo albums. These changes enhanced the diversity of the membership participation and contributed to minimizing culturally specific expression emanating from its Japanese heritage, which had alienated some of the local members, again, including me.

These gradual shifts toward a more culturally appropriate expression in Australia were occurring against the backdrop of a seismic shift as the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood severed their relationship with the Sōka Gakkai, the largest lay organization of the Fuji School. In Australia, as a precursor to these future events, Nichiren Shoshu Sōka Gakkai Australia became SGI Australia (Sōka Gakkai International Australia). Over the period of 1990–1991, SGI President Ikeda was forced to step down by the priesthood as the head of all lay Buddhist organizations associated with the head temple in Japan and all members of Sōka Gakkai International were excommunicated.

No longer constrained by a priesthood focused on imposing formal religious traditions, SGI emerged stronger and more vibrant under the continuing inspirational leadership of Daisaku Ikeda. His contemporary global perspective drew on the language of spirituality, co-existence, self-mastery, empathy, symbiosis and dialogue as key drivers of Buddhist humanism. Ikeda has, in his own words, 'tried to separate out those elements in the traditional interpretation of Nichiren Buddhism that are more reflective of Japanese cultural and historical contingencies than they are of the underlying message.' (Ikeda 2008: 111). SGI Australia's movement progressed dramatically as this became the inspiration for developing its expression in the community. Ikeda's leadership has, for me, directed our organization on the path of an expression of Buddhism free from cultural and gender barriers that were so alienating in the past.

This was not without tension as cultural traditions emanating from Japan and its hierarchical structure were challenged as inappropriate in the Australian context. The 1990s also witnessed the ethnic diversity of the Australian organization shifting, in part as a result of an influx of Chinese Malaysian SGI members. Unfortunately, some members left, unable to reconcile between the ideals of the philosophy and a tendency to emphasize the religious and hierarchical structure, at times perceiving the organization as inflexible and irrelevant. Although activities, including community outreach, expanded and improved, it was not until a process examining the organization's functioning at its basic heart began that a fundamental shift occurred. Through a process of dialogue drawing on the collective experience of the membership, informal group discussion meetings were confirmed as the foundation for the structure and for all activities to remain purposeful and relevant.

The spirit of these small groups was for them to be a space where members and guests could engage in dialogue as a transformative process for everyone involved, centred on sharing experiences of the application of Buddhism to daily living. Rather than organizing large-scale activities and attempting to emulate the Japanese model, emphasis was placed on taking responsibility to host a small group discussion meeting. This shift in focus to the grassroots movement led to an organic expansion as these meetings provided an informal atmosphere for learning about Buddhism, leadership opportunities for all ages, ethnicities as well as addressing the tendency for men to be central figures in meetings. SGI Australia began to reflect the diversity existing in Australian society rather than its Japanese heritage. With groups averaging between five and ten people, care and contact for each member was increased, which created a unified community embracing its cultural diversity.

The learning experience of Sōka Gakkai in Japan and SGI Australia is that a depth in study supports members' confidence in the teaching and practice of Buddhism, as well as providing substance to the dialogue movement. The second president of Sōka Gakkai, Josei Toda, believed that lack of study contributed to members' recanting their association with Sōka Gakkai in the face of opposition and persecution during World War II. Study examinations on Buddhist theory became a proud tradition where even those with no formal education could reach 'professor' level within the Sōka Gakkai. Introduced in 2001 around the time of the shocking events of 9/11, SGI Australia replaced examinations with a community education model of study courses. This dialogical approach, where participants play an active role in their own learning in the small groups, was perceived as more fitting for adult learning. Initially greeted with resistance for breaking with tradition, these continue to be produced in four languages other than English – Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Thai – and have been embraced by all the major ethnic groups within SGI Australia.

The mentor and disciple relationship is the central unifying axis from which Buddhist humanism spreads in Sōka Gakkai generationally. SGI President Ikeda continues this lineage, conducting dialogues with eminent figures with the belief that: 'Dialogue between cultures is so crucial for the development of Buddhism in the next millennium. While staying true to its essence, Buddhism needs to encounter, learn and evolve' (Ikeda 2008: 111). This heritage has spearheaded the confidence of SGI Australia as a model of a grassroots dialogical movement and proof is appearing in the diverse backgrounds of the leadership within the Australian movement that had not existed a generation ago. It is also learning through group dialogue of the varied trials, tribulations and successes of fellow members from all kinds of background that has broadened my understanding of the sometimes very different challenges facing various cultures within our society and has created unity through diversity within SGI Australia.

As an egalitarian teaching and practice bereft of discrimination, it is only through a community of practitioners that these ideals of Buddhist humanism can be tested in reality, otherwise they remain abstract. However, as Buddhism has branched out, it has become enmeshed within culturally specific settings. Through my experience within SGI Australia, I have come to appreciate its universal message is not to be romanticized as a means to retreat or escape from daily living. Enacting the core message of the Lotus Sutra, that is belief in the enlightened potential of each individual, lies in engaging with current struggles of society, which includes family, work and contributing to a peaceful society. The most inspirational aspect of SGI Australia has been the constant flow of dialogue to adapt its expression in contemporary society, without foregoing the essence of Buddhism as a humanist philosophy to be enacted in daily life. Conflict and differences have not been perceived as necessarily negative, rather treated as opportunities for further dialogue and providing a continuous process of reflection, transformation and evolution. As such it has much to offer as a model grassroots

movement and as a positive force for contributing to a peaceful society based on the creed 'that a great human revolution in just a single individual will enable a change in the environment and the destiny of all humankind' (Ikeda 2009).

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3 Ordaining women in Australia

Nagasuri

In this chapter, I will explore the ordaining of Australian women into the Western Buddhist Order (WBO now known as Triratna Buddhist order) from my experience as both a woman training for ordination and, since 2000, as a WBO member helping other women to prepare themselves for ordination.

I was ordained in October 2000 in a deconsecrated Augustinian monastery in Tuscany, Italy, on a seven-week retreat. Seventeen other women, none of whom is Australian, were ordained into the WBO at the same time by women WBO members who were private and public preceptors. I had found the Buddha dharma at the Sydney centre of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO now known as Triratna Buddhist Community) in November 1989 and asked to join the ordination training process for the WBO in mid-1991. I had gone looking for meditation as a means of stress management and in a very short time found myself deeply attracted to the dharma and the FWBO sangha. While I experienced no beginner's mind and found meditation most frequently a struggle, I was strongly convinced by the truth of the dharma. I became very much a doctrine follower. My faith crept up on me much more slowly and was clearly apparent to others long before I could acknowledge and appreciate it myself.

In Sydney, female order members conducted all dharma study, retreats and ordination training for women. This is because during the early years of the order, Sangharakshita, the founder of the FWBO, had seen clearly that for all but beginners' classes and retreats, single sex activities helped most women and men go deeper and confront their conditioning more clearly and incisively. As a feminist academic, I found these conditions congenial and conducive to taking my practice deeper. I experienced little tension between women and men in the Sydney FWBO sangha. Festival days and regular weekly sangha nights at the Sydney Buddhist Centre were friendly and harmonious. I was aware that in England during the early years there had been discord and disharmony in relations between sangha men and women and much emphasis had been put on single sex community living and the decentring of sexual relations from one's life, if one were a serious practitioner. These tensions had not carried over to the Australian sanghas in Sydney and Melbourne to any large degree. There were married and single order members and friends and both heterosexual and homosexual partnerships were accepted, as they are today.

Australia's geographical distance from the FWBO heartland in England had other advantages. Some of the lifestyles that in England had become institutionalized and seen by some as the best and even the only way to practise if one were truly serious, such as working in team-based right livelihood (TBRL) businesses and living in single sex communities, could not be insisted on in Australia. Some small TBRL businesses and some small single sex communities had been attempted in Sydney but none was longlasting. The FWBO sangha in Australia in the 1980s and 90s was small: few order members were free and/or willing to commit themselves to community living or working in a TBRL business. Both require much energy, time, experience in this way of living or working and commitment, and those that were established did not last. There was one longlasting men's community in Melbourne in the late 1980s and 90s and there are now two TBRL businesses in Sydney, neither of them in their present format is more than two years old.

Another advantage arising from the distance from England was that, as there were very few order members, particularly women, it meant that as I became more experienced in the ordination training process some responsibilities for teaching and leading practice for beginners and regulars fell on me as they did on other trainees. I learned and experienced so much more as I took on these responsibilities, which would not have been available had I been training in England.

However, the disadvantages of distance from England were also real and for many disheartening. Our founder, Sangharakshita, and the majority of senior order members (particularly women), were in England and the ordination training process was based there. Some senior women order members visited Australia, which was most beneficial, but the only way to be ordained, unless one were very ill, was to go to an ordination retreat in England or Europe and the longest, most varied and in-depth ordination training retreats were held in England. I was in the fortunate position that I could afford to travel and attend training retreats in England and in 1999, having retired from academia before I was 50, I went and lived in a women's community in England and joined a TBRL business working in a shop. I was convinced that these conditions would be beneficial for deepening my practice and I had the good fortune to avail myself of them. I did not think, however, they were the only means of deepening my 'Going for Refuge' and in time getting ordained. I was ordained in 2000 having done most of my training in Australia living with my son in the early 1990s and in a women's community later. In 2001 three more Sydney women were ordained in Tuscany and returned to Australia after their ordinations. However, not many women were free and able to make these sorts of move and ordination for many seemed a distant, difficult road to travel.

In the 1980s and 90s fewer than five women living in Australia were ordained. This has changed dramatically since 2000 when ordinations began on Australian retreats. Most significantly, in 2007 the first Australasian women's ordination retreat of four weeks was held in New Zealand and during this six Australian women were ordained. The possibility of women getting ordained in the southern hemisphere has had an inspiring and galvanizing effect on women's commitment, practice and

training. In October 2009 another six Australian women were ordained in New Zealand and it is likely there will be more in the near future. Australian and New Zealand female order members who are private or public preceptors lead these retreats. Public and private preceptors are the senior disciples of Sangharakshita who have been accepted as being able to witness the readiness of a person in the ordination process to be ordained. The private preceptor witnesses the taking of the Ten Precepts, gives the person her/his name and introduces him/her to a visualization practice. This is done in a private ceremony with only the preceptor and preceptee present. Later, at a public ceremony, the public preceptor welcomes all being ordained at that time into the order; their new names are announced and the symbol of ordination – a white cloth or *kesa* (sash worn around the neck) is put in place.

At ordination a new order member takes the Ten Precepts (until this time all FWBO practitioners take the Five Precepts) and commits herself to deepen her practice, live in harmony with friends and brethren and to help other beings. We do not wear robes and do not take *vinaya* rules. We think of ourselves as being neither monastic nor lay – of being *in* the world but not *of* it (in terms of samsara's materialist, consumerist and at times ego-centred values). That is, it is our practice to work diligently on ourselves to weaken craving, aversion and delusion. I have found this way of being an enormous benefit in my own practice and in offering the dharma to others. There are no *vinaya* rules or monastic practices that have to be re-interpreted for twenty-first century western conditions. With the Five or Ten Precepts we can live in the world and follow the path to Enlightenment without any dilemmas around traditional ways of practising the dharma. Further, Sangharakshita has offered the movement and order positive formulations of the Five or Ten Precepts that help us explore at deeper and deeper levels the path to wisdom and compassion. As positive formulations their scope is infinite and help one investigate living simply, which resonates with many people's concerns for the environment through excessive production and consumption, and being kinder, which again resonates with many people's concern for the suffering in the world. The positive formulation of the precepts in English is recited whenever the refuges and precepts are chanted, which happens at all FWBO gatherings and daily on retreats.

A year after my ordination I was able to take a voluntary *anagarika* vow. All *anagarikas* in the WBO practise celibacy and undertake to move increasingly towards careerlessness, homelessness and possessionlessness. Sangharakshita's aphoristic teaching ('Commitment is primary, lifestyle secondary (but not unimportant)') encapsulates much of how the FWBO practises. Celibacy, working in TBRL businesses, single sex community living, retreats and classes are all seen as positive aids to taking the dharma in all its aspects deeper into our lives, but they are not taken to be the only methods conducive to progress.

However, there have been some difficulties around the unusual nature (in traditional Buddhist terms) of the WBO's ordination ceremony and its lived implications. Some eastern monastics have found the ordination of women and by women perplexing. We believe this is very much in keeping with the spirit of the

Buddha's teaching and it has become much clearer that nuns joining the Buddha's order in the early days did so the same way as men. The Buddha just said, 'Ehi bhikkhu' or 'Ehi bhikkhuni' ('Come monk' or 'Come nun'). Both western and eastern practitioners belonging to traditional Asian schools of Buddhism have found our lack of lineage confronting. While in Australia, I have not been questioned about these matters by other Buddhists, in England and elsewhere in the world, such questions have been raised with me and with many FWBO members. Understandably, WBO members find themselves treated as lay practitioners by other Buddhist monastics. At times I have felt that the sincerity and depth of my practice were being questioned, perhaps even my ordination, although never explicitly. In Australia in the 1980s and 1990s, the FWBO was very new and relations with other Buddhist groups were infrequent and to me they felt a bit distant and cool. However, since my return to Sydney in 2005, I have found this has changed greatly and that FWBO practitioners are included and welcomed in many inter-Buddhist gatherings.

After my ordination I returned to England and over time became more and more involved in leading dharma study in weekly classes for women who had committed themselves to practise within the FWBO and also women training for ordination in the WBO. I also helped out with beginners' meditation and dharma classes and led practice evenings. In December 2004 I left England and returned to Australia where my only teaching commitment between 2000 and 2004 had been a 10-day study retreat for women on the Bodhisattva Ideal in 2002. Since 2004 I have divided my year between Australia and India – spending six months in each place.

There are a large number of members of our order and movement in India (where they are known as Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana or TBMSG), based predominantly in Maharashtra. While there are many male Indian order members, until very recently there have been only a handful of female Indian order members. Hundreds of women have asked for ordination into TBMSG and even more are members of the movement. I joined a small team of five female order members from the west living for varying parts of the year in Pune and leading retreats, study and meditation classes. Two of our team act as preceptors for Indian women. At present there is only one Indian woman private preceptor. The need for training and opportunities for practice both on retreat and in day-to-day life is enormous and our long-term aim is that, one day, there will be enough female Indian order members able to fulfil this need.

In Australia, I am particularly involved in helping women who have joined the FWBO and those training for ordination, which involves study classes, retreats, meditation practice and meeting up with women on a one-to-one basis. I find much attracts both women and men to the FWBO in Australia as elsewhere. Sangharakshita's clear interpretation of the essential dharma for twenty-first century people, that is, the emphasis on practising Buddhist ethics as the way to live life, particularly aspiring to practise the Bodhisattva Ideal and the equal treatment of men and women, all play their part. There are neither traditional ways of practice nor cultural accretions of different

Buddhist schools to be negotiated, allowing the life-transforming essence of the dharma to have its full impact. As an Australian, both practising and sharing the dharma in the FWBO have been and are an inspiring, transforming, deeply challenging and satisfying way to live my life and to continue to deepen my practice.

4 The journey of a lay female Zen teacher

'On a withered tree a flower blooms'

Subhana Barzaghi

'On a withered tree a flower blooms' is a poetic line by Zen master Dongshan (1974) that I have chosen as a metaphor for the new flowering of Zen in Australia that has emerged from the tree of Asian Buddhism. This metaphor speaks to the perennial wisdom that comes forth from the dissolution of ego self and the old ways of seeing and knowing. The new flowering of western Zen generally is changing as a result of a variety of cultural forces including a growing movement of lay practitioners, family practice, psychology and psychotherapy, environmental concerns and deep ecology, feminism, egalitarian principles, democratic decision-making processes and community management of its organizations. A relatively new tree in the Zen landscape that celebrated its 50th anniversary in July 2009 is the Diamond Sangha, a worldwide network of affiliated lay Zen centres. In addition to the merging of these cultural horizons, the Diamond Sangha, and more specifically the Sydney Zen Centre, which is an affiliate, has formed a budding relationship with indigenous spirituality that is giving birth to an Australian variety of Zen Buddhism that has a different shape and flavour to its traditional Asian or other western counterparts.

One of the most salient differences between the historical and contemporary forms of Zen can be found in the newly discovered role of women. As one of the first female Zen roshis (teachers), in the Diamond Sangha, I feel I have been very close to the heart of this process. In 1996 I received transmission (authorization to teach) in the Diamond Sangha from my American teachers Robert Aitken Roshi and John Tarrant Roshi. I felt empowered with the responsibility of holding up the lamp and light of our Zen school, which has its roots in the Soto/Rinzai tradition that traces its origins back through a lineage of ancestors from Japan to China and with a mythical leap of affinity back to India and the Buddha. My path has been to make sense of how I might fit within this ancient lineage as an independent female teacher among a long line of patriarchs who lived in a hierarchical, monastic tradition within a ranked, patriarchal and feudal Chinese and Japanese society. Yet, this is a deeply intimate tradition that requires a direct realization of the heart-mind that transcends space, culture, gender and time. Curiously, in one of the first Zen retreats that I attended, while chanting the sutras, I felt a completely unexpected and undeniable bond with the successive generations of teachers in our lineage, 'entangling eyebrows' with all the old Ch'an masters.

While there was a mysterious connection with this Zen lineage, it was evident that there were very few historically known female role models to turn to for guidance. Moreover, until recently there were no women teachers in our lineage, except for brief notations including reference to an unnamed tea lady, a station lady, a rice cake vendor and some wandering nuns. These women appear as isolated interlopers in the vast body of Zen literature, only hinting at an untold story of enlightened Asian women. Recently, there has been a growing body of scholarly research that draws from historical, cultural and Buddhist records to uncover from obscurity significant and inspiring tales and accounts of early Buddhist women masters and teachers (Murcott 1991; Levering 1997; Tisdale 2006). I was astonished to discover in *Women of the Way* (Tisdale 2006), that there were female Chinese Ch'an masters living in the T'ang Dynasty who received transmission legitimately and provided teachings. These little known stories invigorated my understanding of women's contribution and role in early Buddhism. I have woven many of these stories into my dharma talks, which dovetail with and enhance traditional Zen stories. These early Buddhist women's stories now form a growing body of work known as the Zen Women's Koan Collection, which is taken up for further study by many female practitioners. Out of obscurity to a visibility in the twentieth century, women are taking up an important role in contemporary Zen. Thirteen years since my transmission, there have been numerous appointments of lay female Zen teachers in the worldwide Diamond Sangha tradition, including six female teachers in Australia, equal to the number of male teachers. Three of these I have invited to teach, not because they were women, but because they were worthy of the role.

The question of translation and transmission

When I was a young female teacher, many questions arose for me on how to approach the translation and transmission of this ancient eastern spiritual tradition and how I might bed it down in this equally ancient soil. I have pondered on the challenges that Zen practice faces as it lands and establishes itself in a western contemporary culture. What Asian cultural rituals need changing and reforming? Robert Aitken Roshi's sound advice stood me in good stead. The first generation of teachers needs to be somewhat conservative and should maintain the traditional forms to ensure that its roots are established in the new land. He advised me: 'Immerse yourself in the tradition for the first five years, don't go radically changing things when you first start teaching, then you will know what to prune, change, throw out and reform.' I took his advice and only after five years of teaching, did I start to initiate some formative changes.

Old rituals in a new land

One of the aspects of Zen practice that I have revisited and which continues to be unresolved is that the Japanese cultural rituals of Zen do not sit comfortably

within an Australian secular society that has predominantly Judeo-Christian cultural norms. Initially, I felt that the Zen rituals were alien and extraneous to the core teachings of Zen, yet over the years I have grown to treasure these Asian rituals along with the rigorous and austere nature of Zen practice that we have inherited. These forms are like rare seedlings that need tender care to take root in a foreign landscape. Yet, these same exotic practices and rituals – bowing to an altar, the austere practice of sitting cross-legged silently facing a wall, wearing black clothing, walking slowly and mindfully in single file in the meditation hall, chanting in Sino/Japanese, ancient Pali and English along with the Japanese terms and language of Zen – are often alienating and culturally jarring for many newcomers. Curiously, many of the early members who were attracted to Zen, like myself, considered themselves part of the new age movement of 'free spirits' in the 1970s, were instantly confronted with the traditional etiquette and formal rules regulating everything in a Zendo: from eating etiquette, to how to sit, bow and walk.

I struggled with the paradox that the spirit of the teachings emphasized freedom, the formless and timeless dimension of our nature, yet that the rituals emphasized the particular form. This paradox, yet crucible of the Zen project, centres around the teachings in the Heart Sutra, 'emptiness is form, form is exactly emptiness'. I persevered and realized that the rituals were the vehicle of, rather than an obstacle to, spiritual awakening and discovered there is freedom within the strict form. In order to understand Zen rituals, Wright argues that: 'To make sense of this basic dimension of Zen, we need to engage its fundamental corporeality by understanding Zen as a specifically *embodied* practice' (2008: 13). Zazen (sitting meditation) is integral to the spirit of Zen, which is realizing no form or 'no mind'. The beauty of Zen rituals and forms is that they point to a realization which has no race, gender, colour or nation, they point to that which is timeless, formless and does not abide anywhere, however this must be realized in the very acts of walking, sitting down and wearing clothes.

Innovative practices, retreats, conferences and workshops

While there have been numerous innovative retreats conducted over the last 20 years, the traditional model of the formal seven day sesshin (or retreat) is still the primary practice of the Sydney Zen Centre, with three or more sesshins conducted annually. In addition to the traditional sesshins, over the last 20 years I have also developed and encouraged a broad and diverse range of workshops, retreats and conferences, for example: Zen and arts retreats, socially engaged Buddhist retreats, women's spirituality conferences, Buddhism and psychotherapy conferences, dharma study and facilitation programs, Zen and poetry retreats, walking the country retreats, death and dying workshops, Zen and dream workshops and dharma gatherings. Along with these, the Zen community has been exploring the resonances between indigenous spirituality and Zen. These innovative programs, retreats and conferences have provided new contemporary pathways that reach out to the wider community. The intention to reach out to the wider community is in

direct contrast to Japanese Zen's selective legacy, where pilgrims would sit in the snow and bang on the temple door three times and sometimes wait for days before being allowed to enter.

I have co-led numerous Zen and arts retreats, sometimes working alongside well-known artists. In 1998 I invited American artist and activist, Mayumi Oda, and, in 1999, I invited renowned calligrapher and translator Kazuaki Tanahashi, to co-lead these creative retreats. These inspiring retreats opened the door for writers and artists to encounter meditation and discover how silence, stillness and focused attention can inform and enhance their art and creativity and how creativity can be an expression of the awakened heart-mind. These creative retreats have not been conducted elsewhere in the worldwide Diamond Sangha and are unique to Australia.

The 'World as Self' retreats focused on the interface between socially engaged work and Buddhist practice. These retreats were held at the Sydney Zen Centre city dojo by fellow Zen teacher, Gillian Coote Roshi and me. These engaged Buddhist retreats focused on taking meditation from the cushion to the streets and applying mindfulness to our every day activities, and offering service to those in need in our wider community. Retreatants embarked on a range of social actions, for example: attending a drug and alcohol meeting, visiting and supporting refugees at Villawood Detention Centre, bush regeneration work, meditations and reflections on death and dying in the Field of Mars Cemetery, supporting a homeless shelter and participating in a despair and empowerment ritual called the Truth Mandala process. The ultimate aim of these engaged Buddhist retreats is to encourage people to relinquish the comfort of their familiar worldview, to broaden their minds and, through compassionate action, help those who are suffering. This innovative retreat format and engaged Buddhist philosophy is documented elsewhere (Barzaghi and Coote 2007).

A significant influence on contemporary Buddhism as it intersects with western culture is psychology and psychotherapy. I have been a psychotherapist for the last 20 years and part of my journey has been contemplating the similarities and differences between the western psychological traditions approach to healing and Buddhism. The interface and dialogue between Buddhism and psychotherapy has been bourgeoning through conferences, workshops and an array of literature along with seminal research by Jon Kabat-Zinn in his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction programs (1990). As part of my growing need to explore this interface, I joined with Geoff Dawson, a Zen teacher in the Ordinary Mind School of Zen, in conjunction with the staff of the Buddhist Library in Sydney, in organizing several national Buddhism and psychotherapy conferences in 2000 and 2002. These conferences fostered a rich dialogue between the western psychological traditions' understanding of the pathologies of the self and Buddhist teachings emphasis on selflessness or that which lies beyond the ego self.

I found that in its best form, psychotherapy and spiritual practice can work as powerful allies in helping students awaken to their true nature. Buddhist practice

has also had a powerful influence on the way many therapists work and how I personally conduct therapy. There is a plethora of new hybrids that combine aspects of Buddhism with various modalities of psychotherapy, such as Hakomi psychotherapy (of which I am a graduate), Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction training, Core Process therapy, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Behavioural therapy and Dialectical Behavioural therapy. The emergence of these new hybrids, while aimed at alleviating suffering, also give rise to concerns such as those expressed at the Diamond Sangha Zen teachers' meetings about whether there is a watering down of Buddhism or if there is an over 'psychologizing' of the dharma. Buddhism is watered down if it is reduced to simply mindfulness training, which is just one component of the Noble Eightfold Path. Many of the new age therapies are an example of extracting mindfulness out of the broader context and philosophy of the dharma teachings. However, what Buddhism can offer to psychotherapy is not just a one-way conversation. Buddhism can be enhanced from a more sophisticated neuroscientific understanding of the mind–body relationship and benefit from the psychological expertise in interpersonal relational dynamics, which is sadly lacking in Buddhist literature. Further more the combination of Buddhism and psychotherapy can contribute to greater health and happiness and alleviate conflict and suffering.

The Buddhism and psychotherapy conferences led to the formation of the Australian Association of Buddhist Counsellors and Psychotherapists Inc. (AABCAP). As an executive training committee member of AABCP, I have helped design and develop our first, two-year professional training course in Buddhism and psychotherapy. One of the intentions for this professional training is to provide in-depth teachings on Buddhism to counteract the present secularising and reductionist tendency to purge Buddhism from its roots, rituals and beliefs and reduce it down merely to mindfulness training.

Power, authority and governance

Another juxtaposition or point of tension and change is in the arena of power and governance and how decisions are made. Teaching in the Zen tradition has been passed on down through the generations by a face-to-face encounter with one's teacher and mind-to-mind transmission of the dharma. Authority to teach is conferred through a dharma transmission ceremony that is a culmination of many years of solid practice and direct realization of mind. Historically the roshi (the abbot of the monastery or a senior teacher who has received transmission) had complete authority over all temple affairs and was the final arbitrator in all monastery decisions. Dharma transmission occurs through a hierarchical axis, with a vertical process of appointment and acknowledgement from a senior teacher to a junior teacher. This process and procedure of appointment still applies today. Influenced by my background of living on an alternative community for 20 years that operated by a consensus decision-making model, one of the changes that I implemented to the structure of power was to separate the spiritual authority of the teachers from the administrative

authority of the Board of Directors. The Sydney Zen Centre is a participatory community management-based organization adhering to egalitarian principles. The roshi's area of authority, expertise and responsibility lies in the arena of providing teachings, leading sesshins and retreats and all activities related to Zen training, while the board is responsible to act on behalf of the community with regard to management of its assets, finances, administration, membership and policies of the centre. The roshi is an honorary member of the board, hence the relationship between the board and the roshi is a consultative one. The two roshis of the Sydney Zen Centre sign a formal agreement with the board, which is a description of their role and responsibilities and is reviewed at the annual general meeting.

A new flower blooms – lay and family practice

One of the most significant changes that has occurred as Zen, and Buddhism generally, takes root in the west is a movement away from monasticism to a growing new order of lay practitioners throughout the world. This movement is based on a shift in understanding the philosophy of renunciation. Rather than literally leading a homeless life of a bhikkhu (a wandering monk), it is an emphasis on a renunciation and non-attachment to the constructed illusion of the house of the ego/self. The art of renunciation for both monastic and lay practitioners culminates in the realization of the true non-abiding, immeasurable, selfless nature of existence. Thus, for lay practitioners it is the art of leaving home without literally leaving home.

The Diamond Sangha is a lay community that has Zen centres in almost all the Australian capital cities, along with a number of smaller groups along the coastal regions. Family practice has brought a softer, more friendly, open and inclusive attitude to the rigorous and ascetic Soto/Rinzai Zen practice that Sydney Zen Centre inherited. The traditional sesshin is still one of the primary ways for students to deepen their practice and immerse themselves in Zen training. Over the last 20 years, this traditional, intensive practice period has opened its doors to provide support for parents to be able to participate in sesshin while having their families camping with them. In order to make this possible, childcare became an integral and important task on the job roster alongside all the other sesshin jobs. In the late 1970s and early 1980s I was a beneficiary of this new development. As a student and parent with a young child, I found this both deeply gratifying and challenging. Gratifying, as it was a joy to be able to sit in the great silence and intensely focus on my koan (koans are primary questions designed to open the heart-mind). Challenging, as it was difficult to manage the transition from silence to embracing my playful, adventurous, raucous, then four-year old son, who was a very different koan! This movement from silence and stillness to mindful, conscious parenting became an integral part of my daily practice. My son's experience of sesshin, looking back, was a positive memorable one, he thought of retreats as 'treats' and loved the one on one attention he received from other caring adults.

Bringing the practice home

The Buddhist teachings on renunciation and the abandonment of desire have been central to the path of enlightenment. Due to this emphasis, there were very few practices specifically focused on bringing the dharma into intimate relationships, sexuality and family life. In fact, pursuing the family life as opposed to the holy life is still considered by the conservative and monastic aspects of the tradition to be the antithesis of the true teachings of the Buddha. All serious seekers and practitioners were eventually expected to take up the robes. In my first decade of practice, I anguished over the dilemma of whether to join the monastery or forge a path in the world. The resolution of this dilemma came after a brief six months of living as a novice nun in Sri Lanka and India, where I realized I did not want to retreat from the world but engage with it. My chosen path was to try and live an awakened life among the trials and tribulations of love and work.

The symbolic Zen ox-herding series of pictures originally created by Chinese Zen master Jitoku Eki, graphically depict a journey of seeking and taming the mind, cultivating and concentrating the mind, awakening to the empty-one ground of the mind and in the final picture we see the man abreast the ox peacefully riding it home to the marketplace with 'bliss bestowing hands' (1970: 156–203). This last image crystallized for me that bringing the practice home from the temple to one's daily life was the ultimate task, for which all else was merely preparation. The application of this ultimate task continues to be challenging for me, juggling family responsibilities and the necessity to earn an income through psychotherapy, on one hand, and juggling the growing responsibilities of the teaching role and the love of the dharma, on the other.

I have come to realize that wisdom is not a given, but a hard earned practice of embodied truthful living, a continual process of awakening to this moment and the next and the next. I have also realized that stopping and taking care of all these difficult family dynamics and situations *is* the practice, that this *is* the path of compassion and wisdom. Practice is not just sitting silently on a cushion, but an orientation to every act and every moment to wholeheartedly hold the intention to wake up to the intimacy that life offers. Lay Zen practice emphasizes bringing mindfulness to the ordinary activities of one's daily life and with mindfulness these activities are transformed into the sacred, and the sacred becomes expressed as this very natural, ordinary and yet exquisite life of grace.

Zen and Australian indigenous traditions

Another unique new avenue of exploration has been the discovery of resonances between Zen and Australian indigenous wisdom traditions. Since the 1980s the Sydney Zen Centre has invited Aboriginal elders, Maureen Smith (Minmia) and Uncle Max (Dulumunmun) to give talks, lead workshops in the bush and share knowledge of indigenous spirituality, songs and stories. In 2006 a symposium was held at the Sydney Zen Centre on 'Zen Approaches to Indigenous Traditions'. Remembering that we sat in Eora country, tribal elder, Uncle Max an elder of the

Yuin nation of the far south coast of New South Wales, shared the symposium with Zen students, Professor Allan Marrett (Professor Emeritus in ethnomusicology), Dr Mari Rhydwen (Zen teacher, linguist and Aboriginal languages consultant) and Dr Caroline Josephs (whose PhD dissertation on sacred oral storytelling included both Zen and Yolngu indigenous Australian storytelling). Each of the presenters has spent decades in the company of Aboriginal people and equally as much time sitting on the cushion and their understanding of each tradition has increasingly been informed by the other.

Professor Marrett studied the songs and rituals of the Marri-tjevin people of the Daly River region of Northern Australia, which is documented in his acclaimed book, *Songs, Dreamings and Ghosts* (2005). As an expression of this evolving relationship, Allan was given permission by Frank Dumoo, the senior custodian for the Walakandha *wangga* tradition to sing a *wangga* song, called *Yendili Yendili* ('Ancient Ground'), which is about looking after country. This song was first sung publicly at the opening ceremony of the Sydney Zen Centre retreat centre, *Kodo-ji* (Temple of the Ancient Ground) in 2001. The song, *Ancient Ground*, has now become part of the Zen Centre's liturgy and is inscribed in the Sydney Zen Centre's sutra books.

One of the important insights and an area of common ground that indigenous spirituality shares with Zen Buddhism is the wisdom of interconnectedness. We can learn an immense amount from the wisdom of indigenous Australians and their spiritual relationship to the land and sense of place. As an example of the wisdom of interconnectedness, a small, keen group of people spent Mother's Day in the southern Royal National Park with aboriginal elder, Uncle Max Dulumunmun. While my husband and I were driving down to the southern highlands, I was thinking about ringing my mother and daughter on Mother's Day. When we gathered in the car park, before heading into the bush, Uncle Max addressed the group by stamping his foot on the earth and said, 'This is our mother', and just at that moment, as if with orchestrated synchronicity, a large flock of white cockatoos rose up out of the nearby trees and flew across the river. The cockatoos' screeching chorus amplified the moment; I was jolted awake. Uncle Max's words, 'This is our mother', permeated the entire day, as we sat on the rocky outcrop investigating the ancient lines etched into stone and listened to the dugong and whale-dreaming stories. 'This is our mother', was echoed at every turn, as we rested under an angophora gum, the kurrawongs sang it, the grove of brilliant crimson waratahs celebrated it.

Zen master Dogen Zenji, a thirteenth-century Japanese priest said: 'The entire world and the ten directions is nothing but the true human body' (Tanahashi 1985: 91). Dogen is pointing to the awakened mind that recognizes its true intimacy with the trees, rocks, clouds, insects, animals and each other, where each thing confirms our true Buddha nature. We think in terms of separate divisions between self, other, nature and the world at large, but Buddhist teachings consider this an illusion of the separate ego. Zen practice points to the realization, that there is no division in reality; life is experienced as a seamless totality.

The implications of the resonances between indigenous spirituality and Zen practice are that Uncle Max Dulumunmun has conducted numerous workshops,

notably 'walking in country', which have been organized and supported by members of the Sydney Zen Centre. A synthesis between Zen and indigenous spirituality is slowly taking shape and finding its way into Zen chanting practice and influencing dharma talks. While this is a mutually respectful relationship of engaging and learning from one another, it is still too early to exactly define the shape of this new conversation and relationship.

Conclusion

In spite of the enormous changes spanning 2500 years, and regardless of all the fresh, innovative and diverse expressions of Zen Buddhism in the west, the practice has remained true to the heart of the original teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. As Zen Master Keizan so beautifully expressed: 'Blooming flowers, falling leaves, directly show, the medicine tree fundamentally has no different flavour' (Keizan 1990: 110). The teachings, practices and Bodhisattva vows that are intoned at every Diamond Sangha meditation meeting affirm an unwavering commitment to the liberation of suffering for all beings. The practice of meditation and awakening to one's true nature is the cornerstone of both the new and the older forms of Buddhism. For the teachings to survive, liberation must be embodied and personally actualized, it must spring forth from each individual's own life and practice, not from adopting Buddhist beliefs, traditional etiquette or ritual devotion.

In the Australian lay Zen community, the struggle for liberation and enlightenment has shifted away from the monastic renunciate lifestyle that was at the heart of the Buddhist movement in Asia to embracing the householder's lifestyle. Lay practitioners are taking up serious, dedicated practice without the robes, with the view that enlightenment is accessible and can be realized by all genuine practitioners who walk the Noble Eightfold Path. Lay practitioners choose to deepen their practice through both attending traditional sesshins and innovative retreats, as well as through celebrating relationships and family life as a pathway for realising a deeper sense of openness and intimacy with all life. Coleman indicates that: 'Buddhism shows that it has often absorbed many elements from the indigenous traditions of the cultures to which it spread or joined with them to create syncretistic new faiths' (2001: 228). As Zen practice finds its home in this sun-kissed country, and intersects particularly with lay practice, western psychotherapy, indigenous spirituality and a democratic governance of its communities, a vibrant, vital and particularly Australian Zen is taking shape and flowering.

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5 Changes and challenges to Vietnamese Buddhism in Australia

Tuong Quang Luu

This chapter will examine the development of the United Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation in light of the growth of the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Australia. It will identify challenges faced along the way and current issues that this organization must now overcome. From its very modest and difficult beginning, the congregation came to maturity as a religious body within a relatively short period, but whether its leadership team can renew itself to stay relevant to the younger generation of Vietnamese Australians remains to be seen.

Historical developments

Very few Vietnamese lived in Australia until the late 1950s when Vietnam joined the Colombo Plan. In the 1960s and 1970s, many thousands of young Vietnamese were sponsored under the Colombo Plan to pursue their tertiary education in Australia. They were among the best and brightest of Vietnam's youth, chosen to be trained overseas as technocrats for its future development. However, before 1975, a permanent Vietnamese community in Australia hardly existed, apart from a few hundred who had settled in Australia as spouses or through adoption. When Saigon fell in April 1975, several hundred Vietnamese students were stranded and allowed to remain in Australia. A year after the Fall of Saigon, there were 2427 Vietnamese-born residents of Australia (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2000).

However, this newly developing community was faced with significant issues. Former Vietnamese students were divided among themselves due to their political allegiances. Those who chose to support the new power back home were reluctant to be involved in the growing Vietnamese refugee community. Others formed part of the educated component of the early social structure of Vietnamese Australians in the late 1970s, such as Dr Tran My-Van from the Australian National University in Canberra, then later in Darwin, or Phan Dong Bich and Tran Tan Tai, engineering graduates from the University of New South Wales and the University of Adelaide, respectively. They undertook voluntary work alongside Australian friends from non-government organizations to assist the newly arrived refugees' cultural reorientation.

The Vietnamese-born population increased dramatically and continuously through the four subsequent censuses: 41,096 in 1981, 83,028 in 1986, 121,813 in 1991 and 150,941 in 1996. In 1996 there were also 46,756 second-generation Australians of Vietnamese background (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2000). Substantial changes to Australia's immigration and refugee policies in the 1990s saw a rapid decline in Vietnamese arrivals from 1996 onwards. The community's growth in the subsequent decade was due mainly to the Australian-born second and subsequent generations of Vietnamese Buddhists, who have fundamentally changed not only the demographics of the estimated 250,000-strong Vietnamese Australian community, but also its spiritual needs, after only three decades of resettlement.

Difficult first steps and a decade of achievements

The presence of Vietnamese Buddhist monastics and temples evolved slowly. Before 1980 there was not a single Vietnamese monk residing in Australia, let alone a Vietnamese Buddhist temple. Dr Hoang Khoi recalls that, as a postgraduate student at the University of New South Wales, he and his fellow Buddhist adherents held meditation and prayer sessions in private and sometimes celebrated major Buddhist events such as Vesak at an inner suburb Thai Temple that practised Theravada Buddhism. This was not ideal as most Vietnamese are Mahayana Buddhists.

The need for a Vietnamese-speaking monk and a Vietnamese Buddhist place of worship and meditation became more acute as Vietnamese refugees began to arrive in greater numbers after 1975. In 1980 a small group of Vietnamese Buddhists welcomed the first Vietnamese Buddhist monk to Australia from a refugee camp in Hong Kong, Senior Venerable Thich Tac Phuoc. He had been a high-ranking member of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam in Saigon, which was banned by the new communist authorities after 1975. Another refugee monk who came from Malaysia, Senior Venerable Thich Huyen Ton, soon joined him in Melbourne. A third monk, Venerable Thich Bao Lac, came from Japan and settled in Sydney in February 1981.

The growing Vietnamese Buddhist community realized quickly that building a place of worship would prove far more difficult and complicated than originally thought. Today's seemingly well-established Phuoc Hue and Phap Bao monasteries in Western Sydney and other similar Vietnamese temples in Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, disguise the problems of neighbourhood protests, land use zoning and local government building regulations that had to be overcome when locating house-temples in residential areas. 'Buddha worship in a garage' was the description given by the *Sydney Morning Herald* to the very modest brick veneer house that housed the first Phuoc Hue Temple in the working-class suburb of Fairfield, New South Wales, in the early 1980s. The issues faced by house-temples in residential areas remain basically unchanged three decades later (Skennar 2005; see also Skennar, this volume).

The acute unmet needs of the first generation of more mature Vietnamese in an English-speaking and predominantly Christian country motivated groups of young and active Buddhists in Australia to be involved in the temple-building projects of the early 1980s. Hoang Khoi, who was a driving force for the Phap Bao Pagoda project, recalls: 'My mother was a devout Buddhist in Vietnam and here in Sydney, she had nowhere to go for her faith.'

Senior Venerables Tac Phuoc, Huyen Ton and Venerable Bao Lac, together with the Vietnamese Lay Buddhist Associations in Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth, resolved at their inaugural conference in April 1981 in Sydney to establish the Vietnamese Buddhist Federation of Australia (the federation – *Tong Hoi*). The federation's aims were to coordinate dharma activities and further development across Australia and New Zealand (Luu, Chuc-Thanh and Ngoc-Han 1991).

In 1987 the Federation became the United Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation (the congregation – *Giao Hoi*) in Australia and New Zealand, and Most Venerable Thich Phuoc Hue (formerly known as Senior Venerable Thich Tac Phuoc) was elected its first president. Vietnamese Buddhism in Australian then experienced two decades of development from the early 1980s onwards. Newly sponsored monks from refugee camps in South East Asia were appointed to head new projects. Venerable Thich Quang Ba went to Van Hanh Monastery in Canberra, Venerable Thich Phuoc Nhon to Pho Quang Pagoda in Perth and Venerable Thich Nhat Tan to Phap Quang Temple in Brisbane. The congregation also extended its dharma activities to Auckland and Wellington in New Zealand.

In 1982 the congregation and its New South Wales branch began publishing the Buddhist magazines, *Phat-Giao Viet-Nam* and *Phap Bao*, as a means to reach a wider audience. Both are still in circulation today. Prior to the age of the internet, this traditional way of communication was essential as a link for the budding Buddhist community. Another development of note was the efforts to re-activate the 'Buddhist Youth Family' (*Gia Dinh Phat Tu*) concept in each temple from 1983 onwards. In pre-1975 Vietnam, this was a strong national Buddhist movement under the auspices of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam: 'Properly motivated and led, it is potentially an effective way for generational renewal for the lay Buddhist community in Australia', says Phap Loi, a Buddhist youth leader with training experience both in Vietnam and in Australia. As lay Buddhist leaders, he and others guided the Buddhist Youth Family during its formative years in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The congregation became known nationally and internationally through its membership of the Australian Buddhist Federation, the World Sangha Council and the World Fellowship of Buddhists. By the early 1990s Vietnamese Buddhists could frequent their own temple for worship and dharma learning in Canberra and all state capital cities except Hobart, although a small community in Darwin had to rely on sporadic visits by monks residing in the southern states. However, in 1999 the congregation split and two-thirds of its membership joined a newly created second organization.

Engagement with subsequent generations

United Buddhist congregations and individual temples in Australia understand the need to engage with young people in the community. Their ability to change themselves and to train and nurture a new generation of Buddhist leaders will determine their future success. When the current leadership was asked to identify their most difficult challenges, invariably they identified the issues of communication with the young Australian-born generation and the temples' relevance to the youths' aspirations. Some of the strategies utilized to meet these challenges are as follows.

Temples have sponsored young monks and nuns from Vietnam to join Australian-trained monks and nuns. Locally trained monks of Vietnamese background who are young graduates would be ideally suited to replace their first generation elders. But an 'ideal' solution is often elusive. This sponsorship has had two drawbacks:

1 It takes a long while for young monks and nuns to adjust themselves to the Australian cultural and social environment, especially when they are not fluent in English.
2 Retention is low. Senior Venerable Quang Ba estimates that some 50 per cent of the sponsored return to secular life within five years of arrival.

Vietnam has a good track record in the field of religious training, through combination of in-temple learning and practice with full-time attendance at an advanced institute of Buddhist Studies. Before 1975 Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon was a major learning centre for lay Buddhists and trainee monks and nuns alike, even though the university's admission criteria were non-denominational. Most Venerable Bao Lac and Senior Venerable Quang Ba were graduates from the Saigon-based Hue Nghiem and Nhatrang-based Hai Duc Advanced Institutes, respectively, while Most Venerable Phuoc Hue used to manage Buddhist schools in the Mekong Delta.

Discussions regarding the creation of an Overseas Vietnamese Advanced Institute of Buddhist Studies, located in Australia, have taken place intermittently during the last two decades, but such a scheme remains, at best, aspirational. An ambitious expansion of Phuoc Hue Monastery in New South Wales would have included an Institute of Buddhist Studies, but the plan failed to materialize. Instead, retention of sangha members has become an issue. At least three young and academically inclined monks have left Phuoc Hue for secular life within five years of their formal ordination. Those monks who are academically successful and stay as serving members of the sangha have often taken a more traditional role elsewhere. Senior Venerable Thich Phuoc An, for example, is now abbot of a Vietnamese Temple in Auckland, New Zealand.

The majority of the 50 Vietnamese monasteries and house-temples located across Australia and New Zealand are still managed by the first-generation monks and nuns trained in Vietnam. However, the generational gap between the

sangha and the Buddhist community's younger members appears to have been partly addressed with some success. For instance, at Phap Bao Temple in New South Wales, the second abbot, Venerable Thich Pho Huan is a young man who completed his education in Victoria before receiving in-temple training in Sydney for 16 years. He is very keen to keep touch with the young and old not only by face-to-face interactions but also, with his laptop in hand, through modern technology. At Quang Minh in Melbourne, Senior Venerable Thich Phuoc Tan, who came to Australia as a refugee minor, is now a bilingual, bicultural abbot who is active in interfaith dialogue and youth matters. Another example is Venerable Nguyen Tang, Deputy Abbot at Quang Duc. He was trained in Vietnam but successfully re-qualified at La Trobe University. He is the webmaster of one of the better designed Vietnamese temple websites.

In gender terms, however, the ratio between abbots and abbesses is around 10:1, reflecting the historically strongly male-dominated Vietnamese sangha. The gender imbalance within the sangha will take a long time to change, if ever, despite the increasing number of nuns entering the United Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation.

Still in their late 30s or early 40s, Senior Venerable Phuoc Tan, and Venerables Nguyen Tang and Pho Huan are among the second generation of Buddhist leaders who represent the best hope for renewal and growth of Vietnamese Buddhism. Not only are they re-activating the connection with the young through the traditional way of the 'Buddhist Youth Family', but they are also able to communicate Buddhism as a living and evolving religion to different groups of people – those who were and remain Buddhists, those who are lapsed Buddhists and those who are yet to be interested in Buddhism.

Conclusion

Vietnamese Buddhism has shared the same testing problems of other non-Christian religions in its efforts to establish itself in a predominantly Christian country. Thanks to strong support from the refugee community during their early resettlement, the congregation was able to expand in a timely manner throughout Australia to meet the spiritual needs of mainly first-generation Buddhists. However, as the demographics among Vietnamese Australians have changed, the congregation has to move forward to attract younger Buddhists. Numerically, the congregation is well equipped with 50 monasteries and house-temples in Australia, but its second-generation leadership – small in number and imbalanced in gender at this stage – is still finding ways to engage with the young, bicultural, technologically literate and English-speaking Vietnamese Australians.

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2 Buddhism in action down under

1 Educating for wisdom and compassion mind

Patricia Sherwood

I have taught for over 30 years in the Australian university sector and have a deep commitment to education as a process for creating skilful states within individuals and communities. In 1986 I moved from Perth to Bunbury, to become a foundation member of this regional campus of Edith Cowan University. I taught many human service courses including the world's great religious traditions. I decided that for each tradition I would give one academic lecture and I would invite one practitioner of the tradition to give one lecture from a practitioner's experience. When I came to teach Buddhism, the material was immediately familiar and I read deeply, including the entire Pali canon. When Ajahn Jagaro and Ajahn Brahm, the Thai-trained Theravada teachers from the Western Australian Buddhist Society visited the class to lecture on Buddhism, a deep silence opened into the sound of bell ringing. I was awakened by the peacefulness of their presence, as were the students. Nothing disturbed the mind states of these monks and, as they walked down the university corridors, a quietness descended around them. At that moment, I knew it was this state of mind that enabled wisdom and compassion to be cultivated, free from fears, irritations, anger, aversion and desire. I wanted to acquire that state of mind so that I, too, could be a beacon of peacefulness in this sometimes troubled world. At the end of the course, 52 per cent of the students in the class voted Buddhism as the worldview they would be most interested in understanding more about. It was clear Buddhism provided a range of tools to deal with our day-to-day stressful mind states, and tools to transform them into a 'clear forest pool' from which wisdom and compassion could arise. I was inspired by Ajahn Chah's vision of this still forest pool:

> All kinds of wonderful, rare creatures will come to drink at the pool, and you will see clearly the nature of all things. You will see many strange and wonderful things come and go, but you will be still. This is happiness of the Buddha.

This was the birth of the impulse to develop education programs for cultivating the peaceful mind. Through the Edith Cowan University community education programs for the public, I ran a series of programs on Buddhism which proved immensely popular and followed this up by establishing the Bunbury Buddhist

Interest Group, which met fortnightly for the next six years to study Buddhism. We meditated, watched videos on Buddhism and discussed Buddhist philosophy and psychology. Between 1986 and 1989 I scripted three educational videos with the media unit at Edith Cowan University on the experience of convert Buddhist practitioners in Australia, the monastic experience and an introduction to a Buddhist migrant's experience in Australia. To explore and document the conversion experiences of non-ethnic Australian Buddhists, I commenced a research project into their experiences that concluded that Buddhism provided a meaning system that was connected to the cultivation of compassion and care for others. It provided practical tools and insights to create a peaceful mind and life that is less stressful, a space for the cultivation of deep insights into one's life and the experience of connectedness to self, others and the world around them of all living beings. As a result of this research, in 1997, I was invited to represent Australia at the first global conference of Buddhist monks and scholars in Colombo, Sri Lanka. As the plane circled this beautiful green island, I felt I heard my name called. It was like coming home. The conference was celebrating 50 years of Sri Lanka's independence and, in spite of the terrorist attack on the sacred temple of Kandy just six months before, thousands of monks from around the world attended. It was awesome to see the degree of scholarship among these monks: doctorates, masters, and vice-chancellorships in universities around the world. The presence of Buddhism was palpable in the lives of the Sri Lankans, in the very soil of the country, in the air that one breathed. In the oldest temple of Colombo, which is over 1000 years old, I took my Five Precepts.

I returned to Australia with a renewed vision of the fruits of Buddhist practice, both in terms of wisdom and compassion and how I might support the growth of education for positive mental health in Australia. On my return to Australia, I was inspired to research engaged Buddhist practice in Australia. It was time that the compassionate heart of Buddhism was uncovered and in 2000 I started the initial research on the Buddhist contribution in Australia to education, prisons, hospitals, the environment, the peace movement, the human rights movements and mental health services, particularly psychotherapy and counselling (Sherwood 2004).

As a counsellor and psychotherapist, I was interested in the state of our minds and ways to create greater mental health. I participated in the Buddhist psychotherapy summer schools held biennially by the Kagyue-vam-Institute in Melbourne, where I met other practitioners and members of the public interested in the potential of the newly emerging discipline of Buddhist psychotherapy and counselling. This new discipline was a marriage between Buddhist psychology and different schools of western psychotherapy and was an effort to bring to western clinical work a broader perspective of interconnectedness, an awareness of the importance of the present moment and an understanding of the role of attachment to permanence, clinging to aversions and desires in the creation and perpetration of mental suffering. At that time, the Amida Trust in England and the Naropa University in the USA had begun government-accredited courses in Buddhist psychotherapy and counselling. After national consultations with Buddhist-influenced counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists from Western Australia, New South

Wales, Queensland and Victoria, I designed, and had accredited by the Australian National Training Authority, the first nationally recognized training program at a tertiary level in Buddhist psychotherapy and counselling. These courses included a diploma and advanced diploma of Buddhist counselling and psychotherapy which were also registered for overseas students. The course provided training in Buddhist psychotherapy and counselling for people already practicing or intending to become a counsellor in Australia. These courses were also registered with the professional counselling bodies of Australia. It was accredited under the auspices of Sophia College in 2002.

Sophia College is now a non-profit educational company managed by a board of directors with campuses in Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth. It began in 2001 with the vision of providing holistic ways of creating mental health because of my deep concerns at the rapidly popular methods of drugging people with mental health problems long term. These people seemed too often to lose the capacity for insight and become drug dependent. The Buddha reminds us that a human incarnation is a blessed incarnation because the person has the capacity to cultivate insight and become awakened. It seemed that mental health problems were too often hampering our destiny as human beings, which is to wake up to the true nature of our minds and become free from mental bondage. In keeping with the Buddha's teachings, the core values of Sophia College are the cultivation of wisdom and compassion, and integrity, as reflected in the mission statement:

1. To advance holistic knowledge which integrates the empirical and experiential in the disciplines of counselling, psychotherapy, psychology, social sciences and education.
2. To collaborate with local and international partners to cultivate cross-cultural richness, diversity of professional applications and promote ongoing professional development networks that are supportive of holistic approaches to human education and mental health.
3. To provide leadership in innovative programs for human mental health and community flourishing that combine the scientific and creative dimensions of human faculties.
4. To enhance responsible and ethical practice in the mental health professions, social sciences and education.
5. To promote social justice by generating and participating in innovative projects that deliver holistic mental health services to economically disadvantaged individuals, communities and countries.
6. To create a lifelong passion for learning, a spirit of humility in the face of human unknowingness, an urge to challenge what is known in a search for what is yet unknown and a commitment to finding meetings between the material and immaterial aspects of human experience.

Sophia College commenced with a strong compassionate social justice agenda, ensuring that opportunities were created for people in economically impoverished communities to also acquire training in mental health. An extensive scholarship

program saw us training applicants from Buddhist communities in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Sri Lanka as well as black Africans from Zululand and indigenous Australians. Special scholarships are available for members of the Buddhist sangha or members of religious orders who are working actively to promote the well being of their communities, and monks, nuns and priests have attended our training programs. These include fee scholarships up to the value of $5,500 dollars for our diploma awards.

In 2006 Sophia College had a graduate diploma in Buddhist psychotherapy and counselling nationally accredited for psychologists, counsellors and other mental health practitioners wanting specialized training in the field of Buddhist psychotherapy. This course is being delivered in Perth, Melbourne and Brisbane. Together with the diploma in Buddhist psychotherapy and counselling this remains the only government-accredited course in Buddhist psychotherapy and counselling in the Australian tertiary education sector. These courses emphasize the place of meditation, mindfulness and associated breathing practices in the cultivation of mental health and well being, with clinical applications such as pain and stress management, mind-body health and well being, psychosomatic issues, practices for working with grief and loss, palliative care, as well as karma and ethics. They also give attention to the role of the therapist in the psychotherapeutic encounter, particularly the role of the therapist in cultivating insight into their own mental states and transforming them, rather than projecting them onto the therapeutic encounter.

The courses aim to be comprehensive, not sectarian, and embrace the three traditions within Buddhism: Mahayana, Theravada and Vajrayana. The teachers have a wide diversity of training in their Buddhist backgrounds, as well as being professionally qualified in their fields as psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers and counsellors. The current teaching team comprises Dr Kwong Djee, a medical doctor with extensive experience in counselling, widely published in the field of Buddhism and palliative care work and who has extensive translation experience with Master Hsing Yun, in the Ch'an tradition in Buddhism; Dr Dale Martin, a mindfulness-trained therapist who completed pioneering work in Australia after training with Dr Kabat Zinn, and who specializes in pain and stress management; Dr Phillip Greenway, a lecturer at Monash University and experienced Buddhist counsellor; Dr Jacqui Dodds, a psychotherapist and social worker published in the field of cancer and recovery with extensive Buddhist meditation experience in the Kagyu lineage; and Dr Patricia Sherwood, who specializes in the mind-body connection as a Buddhist psychosomatic therapist.

As a teacher and somatically trained psychotherapist, I know that I can only teach what I have trialled and discovered in myself. I am the first client and so I have spent many hours exploring the connection between breathing and bodily well being and the consequences of contracted breathing in response to external triggers of fear, or anger, aversion or desire. Occasionally, I glimpse the 'still forest pool' within my mind. At the heart of all the educational programs in Sophia College is the commitment of staff and students to the healing of their own inner states of feeling and thought. Only in the degree to which those in training

in psychotherapy and counselling can become as lamps to themselves will they be able to shed light on the pathway for clients seeking to recover their states of inner peace and happiness. This is reflected in the motto of Sophia College: 'From wisdom to healing'.

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2 Venerable Robina Courtin

An unconventional Buddhist?

Anna Halafoff

Venerable Robina Courtin is one of Australia's most prominent Buddhist teachers. Born in Melbourne, she has been a Buddhist nun in the Tibetan tradition for over 30 years. As founder of the Liberation Prison Project and a teacher of international renown, Venerable Robina has been the subject of two Australian documentaries *Chasing Buddha* (2000) and *Key to Freedom* (2007). The wisdom, directness and humour of her teachings, coupled with her limitless compassion, have served as inspirations to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. Arguably, it is her particularly Australian down-to-earth style that has enabled her to deliver Buddhism in a practical and accessible way to westerners both in and beyond Australia. This chapter draws on Australian media sources, including transcripts of documentaries, radio interviews and newspaper articles, to provide an account of Venerable Robina's life story and her insights on practising and teaching Buddhism, particularly in the Australian context. In so doing, I examine her supposedly unconventional approach to Buddhism, arguing that she may, in fact, be more traditional than the Australian media have led their readers to believe.

Venerable Robina Courtin in and beyond Australia

Robina Courtin was born in Melbourne in 1944 into a Catholic family, the second of seven children. Despite economic hardships, she was educated at Sacré Coeur, a prestigious Melbourne girls' school in East Malvern. As a young girl, Robina was a devout Catholic with a questioning and rebellious nature, whose good heart remained largely hidden behind her bad behaviour. At the age of 12, she begged her mother to let her become a Carmelite nun like her hero, Saint Therese of Lisieux, who was ordained at 14. Yet by 19 Robina had traded her religious aspirations for the experimental life of a hippy in the 1960s. She moved to London in 1967, dedicating the next decade of her life to left-wing, black and feminist politics in the United Kingdom and Australia (Hurrell 2000; Simpson 2002; *Compass* 2007; Irving 2007b).

In the mid-1970s, Robina also became a passionate student of marshal arts, until a car accident abruptly cut short her karate career. During her recuperation in Melbourne she saw a poster advertising a Buddhist course with Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the first Tibetan Lamas to visit and teach in Australia, at Chenrezig Institute in Southern Queensland (Croucher 1989: 90–92; Simpson 2002). Robina was immediately attracted to the reflexive and devotional nature of Tibetan Buddhism, which was well suited to her questioning mind and sat comfortably with her Catholic upbringing. It was at Chenrezig Institute that she finally realized: 'Ah! That's the kind of nun I want to be' and 18 months later Lama Zopa ordained her at Kopan, the Lamas' monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal (Irving 2007b).

Venerable Robina then spent the next 10 years studying Buddhism while working for Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa's Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), helping to develop Wisdom Publications in the United Kingdom and overseeing its editorial and production departments. In 1987 at the request of Lama Zopa she began teaching Buddhism in Australia and, in 1994, she was appointed editor of FPMT's *Mandala Magazine* in California. In 1996 the magazine received a letter from an 18-year-old Mexican-American prisoner, Arturo, a Los Angeles gang member who had been incarcerated since he was 12. Venerable Robina responded to his message and sent him a book on Buddhism. Word spread and, by the end of 1997, she was writing to more than 40 inmates throughout the USA. This led her to establish Liberation Prison Project (LPP) as a non-profit organization in California (Curtis 1998; *The Spirit of Things* 2003; *Compass* 2007; Irving 2007b).

Venerable Robina's story was widely publicized in Australia when *Chasing Buddha*, an Australian Film Industry award-winning documentary made about her was shown on SBS (the Special Broadcasting Service, Australia's multicultural and multilingual radio and television public broadcaster) in 2000 and given a theatrical release in several Australian cities. The film follows Venerable Robina criss-crossing America as she teaches Buddhism at FPMT centres and in maximum-security prisons. Due to *Chasing Buddha*'s success, Venerable Robina was invited to visit prisons and to give public talks throughout Australia (Hawker 2000; Waldon 2000; Walker 2000). What began with a letter from one prisoner in 1996 has grown into an organization with offices in the United States and Australia and branches in Mongolia, Spain and Mexico. LPP receives hundreds of letters a month and over 13 years has corresponded with or visited thousands of prisoners. In 2007, *Key to Freedom*, a documentary about Venerable Robina's work in Australian prisons was screened on Australia's ABC TV (*Compass* 2007; Irving 2007a; Irving 2007b).

Despite what appears as many different tracks within one lifetime, Venerable Robina well describes the continuity of her experiences:

> [I]f I look back on my life, externally it looks very different, the threads … but internally to me … it's completely constant, and from the beginning that I can remember, I always had this wish to understand the world … and … having a lot of energy, wanting to do something about it. So that really hasn't changed.
>
> (*The Spirit of Things* 2003)

Not your average nun? Aussie, down to earth and accessible

Following the release of *Chasing Buddha*, which includes a scene of Venerable Robina using four-letter words, journalists frequently used extreme and sensationalist descriptors depicting her as somewhat of a subversive superhero. This is well illustrated by headlines and phrases such as: 'There is nothing passive about this Buddhist nun'; 'a violator of expectations' (Hawker 2000); 'Wilder than your average nun' (Morgan 2000) and 'the gal who put some attitude into Buddhism' (Brundrett 2003). Journalists have concurrently juxtaposed Venerable Robina's 'unflinching honesty and gutter-mouthed outbursts' with 'her brilliant … compassion and wisdom' (Waldon 1998), her 'open and infectious' smile (Curtis 1998) and 'hard-boiled humanity' (Roach 2000). She has been described as 'a diminutive dynamo with a big heart' (Irving 2007b) and a 'surprisingly soft centre' (Hall 2000). Indeed it is her 'life of extremes' that has arguably made her so interesting to the Australian media and public (Byrnes 2000).

'Forget your image of an obedient and mild-mannered Buddhist', says Rachel Kohn, 'she does wear the maroon robes of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, but Australian, Robina Courtin, has brought her edgy personality and boundless energy to her 24 years as a Buddhist nun' (*The Spirit of Things* 2003). Indeed it is her 'forthright' and 'matter-of-fact Aussie attitude' that has been described as having 'prepared her perfectly for her work with prisoners in some of the United States' toughest jails' (Passmore 2001; Brundrett 2003). Prisoners from Kentucky State Penitentiary (quoted in *Chasing Buddha* quoted in *Sunday Herald Sun* 2000) described her teachings as 'very easy to relate to because she puts them in a way that everyone can understand'. They also described her as having an 'easy-going' style and her teachings as 'accessible', 'fun' and 'interesting'.

In addition, Venerable Robina's own experiences of suffering and violence in her youth, including both incest and rape (Irving 2007b), have enabled a level of empathy to develop between her and the prisoners and also with female students both inside and outside the prison system. As the majority of Buddhist teachers, and particularly Tibetan Buddhist Lamas, who have visited and taught in Australia have been men, it follows that Australian women are drawn to the teachings of Buddhist nuns in the Tibetan tradition, such as Venerable Robina Courtin and Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, with whom they can more easily identify. In 1996 Lama Zopa Rinpoche wrote in a 21st birthday card to Arturo, the first prisoner that Venerable Robina had responded to, 'your prison is nothing in comparison to the inner prison of ordinary people' – the prison of attachment, anger, depression and the other everyday unhappy emotions (Courtin quoted in *The Religion Report* 2005). Consequently, Venerable Robina's advice is the same to all 'prisoners', regardless of gender. It's about developing self-respect through enhancing one's positive qualities: 'The bottom line … is that a human being looks at themselves, takes responsibility and knows they've got potential to change for the better' (Courtin quoted in Irving 2007a). According to Venerable Aileen Barry of Liberation Prison Project in Australia, not only does Venerable Robina have a profound understanding of suffering, 'what she's able to put across to people very clearly is it is possible to transform [it] … she's a very grounded, practical, living example of that' (*Compass* 2007).

Unconventional or traditional?

Scholars have noted that Australians – and the media – hold a very limited understanding of diverse Buddhist traditions and of Buddhism's history in Australia (Croucher 1989; Sherwood 2003: 1, 3). While Australians commonly view Buddhists as either in silent contemplation or jovial laughter, the contributions that Buddhism has made to social change and that women have made to Buddhism in Australia remain largely unrecognized (Adam 2000; Sherwood 2003: 1, 3). In actuality, eccentric, strong teachers and women have played a leading role in Buddhism in Australia since the nineteenth century and a commitment to a reflexive, pragmatic approach to Buddhism and to Buddhist-inspired methods of social change have long been prevalent in Australia (Croucher 1989; Adam and Hughes 1996; Adam 2000; Sherwood 2003). As Sherwood (2003) explains, a commitment to social change among Buddhists is not a new or western development, it is a continuation of the tradition of the Bodhisattva Path, as described by Shantideva, the eighth-century Indian scholar and monk, which stresses the Mahayana ideal of altruism and of the Bodhisattva's pledge to take whatever form may be necessary in order to be of most benefit to others (Shantideva 2000: 33).

It follows that the so-called unconventional Venerable Robina Courtin is actually quite traditional. She follows the Bodhisattva's path of altruistic motivation for personal and social change. She begins and ends her teachings with traditional prayers. She dispenses traditional methods of practices, meditations and vows. She encourages her students to study Buddhists texts and to meet with qualified teachers (*The Spirit of Things* 2003; Irving 2007b). Due to her appearance, as an Australian woman and down-to-earth dynamo, who has travailed many difficult periods in her own life: '[I]n her own special way she has humanized Buddhism, made it more accessible and within reach for people with normal conditions and failings' (Brundrett 2003). In so doing, she has proven 'inspiration comes in all shapes and sizes' (Roach 2000), following the Bodhisattva's tradition, appearing where and when needed and enacting whatever it takes to help all beings to be free from suffering and to find happiness, thus challenging prevalent notions of what a Buddhist in Australia ought to be like. Consequently, Venerable Robina can be viewed as a proponent of what Phillips and Aarons (2005) have defined as a traditional rather than new age approach to Buddhism that is little understood in contemporary western contexts. Further research is necessary to substantiate this claim, this could include a sociological study focused on the experiences of Venerable Robina's students, particularly prisoners and women, and also a comprehensive history of women in Buddhism in Australia following on from Croucher's (1989) and Adam's (2000) studies.

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3 Being all of who I am

Buddhist monk and chaplain

Venerable Thich Thong Phap

I grew up a Methodist. At five years of age I announced to my entire family that I wanted to be a minister of religion. As I grew older I thought about becoming a chicken farmer and a linguist but at age 15 I returned to my original vocational choice. By age 17, when my idealism was at its peak and I had read a life of Saint Francis of Assisi, my vocation transformed into a desire to become a monk. I tried to test my vocation in an Anglican religious order at age 18 but that did not work out. By the end of my nineteenth year and my first at teacher's college, I had lost my Christian faith but not my monastic vocation. What to do? About seven years later, in 1978, I discovered Buddhism. Thoughts of becoming a monk returned to me and I explored the possibility again, but the time was just not right. Another 17 years went by during which I found my way to Vietnamese Zen. In 2001 I met my teacher in Vietnam who gave me permission to ordain. In 2004 I was made a novice and, 20 months later, I was ordained a bhikkhu. It took 47 years from the first recognition of my vocation to my ordination.

All the monks and nuns in my tradition are primarily meditators, but in Australia we all live singly or in very small groups and many are involved in teaching meditation. I do not have a group of lay people to support me, neither do I have a private income. So I receive government benefits and work three days a week as the volunteer Buddhist chaplain at Flinders University, which is my 'temple'. The path of a Buddhist pastor is not clearly set and I constantly ponder on what it involves. In this chapter, I reflect on how to integrate these two aspects of my work.

In February 2007 I spent Vietnamese New Year in another Australian city staying in a temple with a monk ordained in my tradition. I enjoyed very much the company of my brother monk and the lay people who support the centre. On New Year's Day a man visited the centre and we engaged in conversation. He had very certain ideas about what Zen was and felt perfectly at ease in sharing his views with me. After a short while two ladies arrived and wanted to meet the Australian monk. They were lovely, genuine people. One of them was a registered nurse in a nursing home. After about an hour of conversation they made me an offering and left. In the meantime the man had returned. 'Why did you waste your time talking to those two women?' 'Well, that's my job.' 'You are not a Christian pastor. You are a Buddhist monk', he continued, taking up quite a bit more of my monastic time.

Then, in July 2007, I attended a retreat I had co-organized with others at Glenbarr, a Uniting Church campsite near Strathalbyn in the Adelaide Hills. It is a beautiful place especially in mid-winter when everything is lush and green. Three days before the retreat a few of us went to Glenbarr to finalize the arrangements. The lady who is the contact person for the centre arrived to show us around. One of the buildings is the original nineteenth-century home of the family who donated the property to the church. It is still furnished in the style of the 1920s. As we were standing in the hallway, I noticed a wooden shepherd's crook and remarked on its beauty. The lady took it off of its hook and handed it to me. It felt so powerful to hold. I asked her why she had put it in my hand. 'It looks like it belongs with you in your robes.'

These two incidents awakened within me the sense that although my primary task as a Buddhist monk is my meditation practice, to be really true to myself I had also to be a pastor. Interestingly I had been accepted into a course in clinical pastoral education (CPE) at the Repatriation General Hospital, which started just after this second incident. CPE is a process of reflective adult learning based in the pastoral setting in which the individual works. One of my goals for the CPE course was to explore and claim my authentic identity as pastor through my pastoral relationships with people at Flinders University. Of course, I must recognize that the idea of pastor or shepherd is not obviously present in Buddhism. However, I consider the bodhisattva a Buddhist equivalent to the pastoral archetype. Like Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, as a pastor one has to listen deeply and without judgement in order to alleviate the suffering of the world.

That is what I endeavour to do, particularly when others suffer ambiguities inherent to being a Buddhist in the west. For instance, once I was sitting with another chaplain and a student at Flinders University. A young man of Asian origin walked by and we invited him to join us. He introduced himself as Mickey. He spoke perfect Australian English and was a Buddhist. He asked me how I found out about Buddhism, so I told him. While he didn't practise Zen, he did say that he was attracted to it. What unfolded very quickly in our conversation was a story quite typical of many young Asian Buddhist Australians. Essentially, it is the story of conflict between the young person and their families and between the temple and the young person. This is due largely to living between two worlds. The first is the world of their family and their faith, while the second is the world into which they have either been born or have been thrust due to immigration, and that is the largely secular, individualistic Australian culture.

Mickey told me how the monks and his youth group had disagreed. The youth group had been thrown out of the temple by an angry monk: 'I thought monks weren't supposed to get angry, at least that's what they say. But he did. I don't like the way those monks behave. They don't behave according to Buddhism.' We talked for a while about how monks are people too. This experience was impacting on his life within his family. It was clearly a very emotional issue for Mickey as his eyes filled with tears. I asked him what he loved about being a member of his ethnic community. He struggled hard to find much but he did love being part of it. I decided to help him: 'If I was from your culture I would be so proud of my

determined people. And I would love that I am from such an ancient culture and that I spoke such a beautiful language.' 'It's not always beautiful', he replied. 'The food is so good', I added. 'I sometimes get really sick of it and just want to eat Australian food', he complained.

'So what do you love about being Australian?' I asked. This seemed much easier. 'I love how in Australian families you are much freer. My friends can disagree with their parents and you don't have to use all that formal language to speak to your relatives and your elders. You can call them by their first name.' It then began to emerge that Mickey felt like a bad person because he was different from his peers in his community and was still unable to forgive the monks. 'I am scared this will never change', he said. We talked about the inevitability of change to which he responded: 'Nothing stays the same but I want it to change now.' He had also begun to lose interest in his religion and was afraid that he would lose it altogether and thereby lose his way in life. 'Do you have confidence in your own Buddha nature?', I asked. 'Have you taken refuge and the Five Precepts?' He had. 'Remember you can always fall back on the Five Precepts to guide your life even if you want to have a holiday from Buddhism.' He was not certain. I invited him to call on me anytime and he said he would, but I was concerned that he was only saying that to keep me happy. However, I still see him quite often and our contact is warm and friendly.

In listening as deeply as I could to Mickey, I recognized his disappointment with the monks at his temple and the impact of that on his faith. There was his internal conflict, living between two cultures. He felt like a bad person and did not accept himself. He was also impatient with the process of change within himself. I understood that sometimes there is a need for a monk or nun outside the culture to encourage young ones to be Australian Buddhists and to move patiently towards reconciliation with their families and their culture. I have also identified the need for me to understand more deeply the issues that face, in Mickey's case, young men about their inherent goodness and the need to accept themselves as they are in spite of the natural rebelliousness that is often there for them. Finally, there is also the need to support Asian families with respect to the challenges that living in Australia brings them, especially when their culture is so strong and so different from the dominant culture. In the spirit of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, I offered Mickey listening, warm acceptance and affirmation of his Buddha nature.

In my CPE group all but me were practising Christians. We all agreed that understanding and compassion were truly present in the encounter I have just related. Although I strove to authenticate my pastoral care as Buddhist by referring to the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, my view is that understanding and compassion are what they are regardless of the religious categories. There isn't Christian compassion as opposed to Buddhist compassion. Does it then matter if we call our work 'pastoral care' steeped in the Christian language of the gospels or care sharing in the spirit of the Bodhisattvas and steeped in the tradition of the sutras? The question remains open.

The life of a Buddhist university chaplain is, however, more diffuse than a concern with direct pastoral encounters. A Buddhist chaplain in Sydney has, for

example, worked hard supporting young adults to develop the highly successful Mitra Conference, which provides Buddhists with an opportunity to get together and enjoy each other, to hear high-quality talks on Buddhist-related topics, and to provide the opportunity for Australian monastics, Asian and western, to present their perspectives to a much wider audience than they might otherwise gain access to. Some of the universities in Western Australia also have Buddhist chaplains for whom the teaching of meditation is a clear aim. In my own context at Flinders University, my work extends to engagement with various service providers such as the Health and Counselling Unit and the International Student Services Unit. There are a number of multi-faith projects that I participate in throughout the year, including occasional seminars we organize and the orientation programmes at the beginning of each semester. One significant project is the development of the Empty Mirror, a context for silent meditation and sharing on selected themes held monthly at a local Anglican church. I co-facilitate the group with Father Nicholas Rundle, the chaplain to Mission Australia in South Australia, and it attracts Buddhists, Christians, Sufis and various other spiritual seekers.

The work I love the most, however, is simply being an obvious presence on campus. Over the last three years I have developed many warm connections with staff and students, simply by wandering around, going to the library and being involved with groups like the Organic Food Co-op. Sometimes it takes me an hour to walk the 100 metres or so from my office to the library. It is in these settings that I find many opportunities for pastoral care and letting students and staff know that there is a chaplaincy centre available to them. It also nurtures me and provides for my need to be in real contact with other human beings.

In 2006, on his television program, 'Enough Rope', Andrew Denton interviewed a Swedish transvestite. He told the story of how his wife had discovered he was a transvestite and how her anger at him was due, not to his transvestism, but to the fact that he had been dishonest with her. On the program, he said something that I have put up as a 'Wisdom Saying' in my office window at Flinders: 'Be yourself. Everyone else is taken.' Who else can I be? The causes and conditions were there for me to be born a mid-twentieth century, working-class, Christian, South Australian man and to become a Buddhist monk in a Vietnamese lineage. I can only work with who I am and be myself. Recently I was a living book in the Victor Harbor library. I was flooded with other Anglo-Celtic Australians very keen to discuss the dharma, to tell me of their love for Vietnam and to express their pleasure at seeing one of their own in Buddhist robes. Their affirmation is an invitation to me to continue to live the adventurous life of a monk and a pastor.

4 The Buddhist Council of Victoria and the challenges of recognizing Buddhism as a religion in Australia

Diana Cousens

A few years ago I assisted in the creation of the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils. This is a body that joins the various state-level Buddhist councils and enables a unified national voice for Buddhists to be presented at a federal level. Members from the New South Wales, Victorian and Queensland Buddhist Councils met together in 2003 at the Pure Land Learning Centre in Brisbane and wrote the constitution for a national body, the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils (Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils 2009). The Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils committee is constituted of two delegates from each state council. In the preamble to the constitution, two reasons were given for the formation of the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils: to promote the teachings of the Buddha, and to facilitate the recognition of Buddhism as a designated religion by the various governmental and non-governmental organizations. This chapter looks at the work of the federation and that of state councils, such as the Buddhist Council of Victoria, in disseminating Buddhism and supporting the local Buddhist community.

As a Victorian delegate, I participated in the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils inaugural meeting in Brisbane. We hammered out a constitution and elected Mohini Gunesekera, a female lawyer from Sri Lanka and New South Wales delegate, as the first president. One of the things that the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils aimed to achieve was the recognition of Buddhism as a religion in Australia. Surprisingly, this has not happened yet, as the government has not yet recognized the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils, or indeed any other body, as the peak body representing Buddhists. Such recognition will enable a ready dialogue with state and federal governments, enabling the transmission of the interests and concerns of the Buddhist community through a solid institutional pathway. The other major religions in Australia have bodies that are formally recognized by government.

Recognition of Buddhism as a religion will come about when the federal government lends its imprimatur to a peak body that is identified as representing Buddhism. The recognition is pending on the peak body implementing a marriage ceremony for Buddhists and a system of training marriage celebrants. At the inaugural meeting of the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils a 'Buddhist wedding ceremony' was created. Buddhism does not traditionally have a wedding

ceremony, customary laws around inheritance, a judicial system or a caste system. In this, it is unlike many other religions. Australian culture is still heavily constructed around norms developed in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The need for religion to be defined by marriage is a striking example – marriage certainly does not define Buddhism.

Our proposed marriage ceremony was based on the secular service for celebrants in Australia with a few special additions. It reads as follows:

1. *Declaration of names*. Celebrant declares the names of those who are to be married.
2. *Blessings*. Celebrant and/or others recite appropriate prayers and blessings which may be in any suitable language and may include the *Mangala Sutra*, *Refuge Recitation* or the *Siggala Vada Sutra*.
3. *Advice on obligations*. The celebrant expands on the obligations of marriage according to mutual agreement of the parties to the marriage and according to the laws of Australia.
4. *Vows*. The celebrant requests the parties to each recite the following words: I call upon the persons here present to witness that I, AB (or CD), take you, CD (or AB), to be my lawful wedded wife (or husband). Before this Buddhist celebrant and these witnesses, I hereby make a lifelong commitment of love and devotion to you. I make this vow realizing the consequences of the law of karma and I ask protection of the Triple Gem – the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha.
5. *Conclusion*. Celebrant declares the two as husband and wife and wishes them long life and lifelong happiness. There is the opportunity for a concluding recitation of prayers, such as the *Jaya Mangala Gatha Sutra*, or other appropriate texts, as determined by the parties and their Buddhist tradition.

The additions to the secular service are things such as the Buddhist prayers and the nature of the vow, in which it is stated that this vow is made with an awareness of the law of karma. We proposed that individual temples would be able to select suitable people to become celebrants.

At present there is a lively dialogue going on between the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils and members of the Federal Attorney General's department on the issue of Buddhist weddings. The Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils has been asked to provide information on the wedding ceremony and be responsible for nominating and appointing Buddhist celebrants.

It can be seen from this that there is an assumption at the level of the federal government that all religions have a wedding ceremony and that all wedding celebrants receive religious training. In traditional Buddhism the people who receive religious training are principally monks and nuns and there is no traditional Buddhist wedding ceremony (Japan being an exception to this rule). While Buddhism in the west is accommodating a new culture and new cultural norms, the issue of weddings in Australia highlights this transition process. To a large extent, monks and nuns are either not expected, or are actively excluded, from participation in weddings, as stated in the Vinaya:

> Should any Bhikkhu engage in conveying a man's intentions to a woman or a woman's intentions to a man, proposing marriage or paramour-age – even if only for a momentary liaison it entails initial and subsequent meetings of the Community.
>
> ('Sanghadisesa – Wikipitaka' 2009)

While there are lay teachers of Buddhism in Australia, they are substantially fewer than the monks and the nuns who are primarily responsible for teaching in Buddhist organizations. It seems that at this point some kind of program of marriage celebrant religious training will need to be instituted in order for Buddhism to be recognized as a religion in Australia. This is a very peculiar case of Australian cultural norms being retrofitted onto Buddhism.

Buddhism in Australia is characterized by diverse Buddhist organizations belonging to specific traditions that mostly operate at a local level, although some may have interstate affiliates. Having consideration for this tremendous diversity, it has been useful to create ways of working together to represent our interests and needs to the government and to find ways of talking to each other. The first state Buddhist Council in Australia was the Buddhist Council of New South Wales, established in 1985, and this was followed by the Buddhist Council of Victoria, established in 1995. Buddhist Councils have subsequently been established in Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia, and the Buddhist Council of the Australian Capital Territory is in formation. The Councils are incorporated associations registered at the state level and have democratic elections whereby member temples of any nationality are able to vote and participate in the committee.

The Buddhist Council of Victoria has approximately 40 member temples and is actively engaged in representing the needs of Victorian Buddhists to all levels of government. It provides speakers for interfaith dialogue and works widely with the community. The Buddhist Council of Victoria's achievements include initiatives in the spheres of education, prisons and hospitals. The management committee is elected annually from delegates from the member temples.

The Buddhist Council of Victoria has developed a primary school religious instruction syllabus that is operating in eight primary state schools and is run by volunteers. The program works through the World Conference on Religions for Peace, which is a non-government organization that acts as an umbrella organization linking faith communities to the Education Department in the Victorian state government. The program was conceived in 1999, received some substantial donations in 2000–2001, employed a part time co-ordinator and has been running since 2003. The highlights have been in making Buddhism available to children at a very young age. However, ongoing difficulties include maintaining funding and retaining volunteer teachers and training new volunteers. Many additional schools have requested the program but there are insufficient funds and not enough volunteers to meet the need. The Buddhist Education Program has also created a syllabus, 'Discovering Buddha', a practical teaching resource kit that they publish and sell (Buddhist Council of Victoria 2009).

Corrections Victoria – a state government body that manages the prison sector – pays Buddhist teachers (including monks and nuns) to minister to the needs of Buddhist prisoners. Other incidental expenses such as meditation cushions, rosary beads, Buddhist books and images, are provided by donation and there are never enough to go around. Most Buddhist prisoners are from a non-English-speaking background and deeply value the presence of an ordained person from their own language group coming to see them and offering support. There is also a meditation program offered to those recently arrested and awaiting trial who are in the Melbourne Remand Centre. These prisoners are more often not from an ethnic Buddhist background and may or may not identify as Buddhist. The placement of prisons in remote locations across country Victoria has made it difficult to reach Buddhist prisoners, as most temples are located in the state's capital city, Melbourne. In addition, many monks and nuns do not drive and have to be driven to prison appointments. However, prison chaplaincy is active and ongoing and has been in place since 2000.

The Victorian state government is planning to fund multi-faith chaplains in hospitals and this initiative could be implemented from 2010. At present hospital chaplains are nearly always Christian. The presence of funding for hospital chaplains will help to develop robust structures, as a dependence on volunteers can undermine programs in the long term, when people run out of good will or have other commitments. Other state Buddhist councils are also implementing initiatives in these fields.

The Buddhist Council of Victoria has also contributed to the improvement of palliative care in the state. In 2004 I put together a booklet called, 'Buddhist care for the dying' (Cousens 2004). The printing of the booklet was principally sponsored by the Yun Yang Temple of Narre Warren, as well as the Victorian Multicultural Commission. The Victorian Multicultural Commission also funded the distribution of the booklet to all hospitals, prisons, nursing homes and medical teaching establishments in the state. I still regularly speak on the subject at diverse places including Melbourne City Mission, the Austin Hospital and forums on ageing.

In sum, in the 2006 census Buddhists numbered 419,000, making it the largest non-Christian denomination. Across Australia, there are hundreds of temples and centres. State and federal governments are working with the Buddhist community to provide support and resources to assist culturally specific Buddhist needs in many contexts. It is all the more surprising, then, that Buddhism is not yet recognized as a religion in Australia and that this hinges on the extraneous issue of marriage.

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5 Challenges of teaching Buddhism in contemporary society

Lama Choedak Rinpoche

The intention of this chapter is to identify what challenges Buddhist teachings and its practices face in Australia and in the western world more broadly. As a Tibetan Buddhist living in the west, I have been interested in making the teachings accessible to the wider community. Unlike some of my colleagues in the Vietnamese and Thai traditions, my audience is largely made up of people from Judaeo-Christian backgrounds. My experience in teaching westerners and my relationship with other Asian Buddhist teachers has given me a special insight into the challenges of bringing Buddhism to the west.

People who come to Buddhism in Australia tend to be educated intellectuals and either those who have left their own religions or found none that suited their predisposition. They examine the Buddhist teachings, philosophy and practices and accept it with reasoned faith. They are attracted to Buddhism for the unique and refreshing outlook it offers on life and the way it promotes non-violence, peace and compassion. People have also become Buddhist after learning how to meditate. Meditation offers practical tools to relieve suffering and help people to lead a loving, tolerant and compassionate lifestyle. While Buddhism enjoys high approval ratings in the west, many westerners find it hard to understand some Buddhist beliefs and traditional practices, due to the culture and environment in which they live.

By contrast, there is the rigidity and cultural conservatism of most traditional Asian Buddhists, who fear losing ancient practices if they are adapted, changed or even translated to suit a different cultural context. Although they have faith in Buddhadharma, they do not necessarily have a sound understanding of actual Buddhist teachings. Some are also apprehensive about westerners practicing Buddhism. It is important to understand these two opposing cultural perspectives that appear to be creating challenges. Some Buddhist centres in Australia become split due to cultural constraints and attachments.

Buddhism was primarily a spiritual tradition suited to those who live a monastic life. The Buddha himself led a monastic life and influenced his only son, Rahula, to become a monk. Most Buddhist countries have a tradition of dedicating at least one son to become a monk. Monasticism is highly respected among Buddhists and there are many good reasons for this. However, the importance of renunciation and the idea that one can only attain liberation by becoming a monk or nun is less

appealing to most Judaeo-Christian Australians. Many who come to Buddhism in Australia have turned their backs on Judaeo-Christian religions due to the great damage caused by monastics to many young people's lives. Therefore, some are also curious and suspicious of monastics. They want to know what the monks or nuns do if they are not actively contributing to the society and their own upkeep. In the Asian community, there are hardly any problems supporting monks and nuns. But among Australians there is a resistance to doing this. Recently, ordained monks and nuns in Australia may also expect to be fed, taught and looked after by the teacher, or the organization, in the same way that this is offered in some Buddhist monasteries in Asia. Most Buddhist organizations in Australia are very small and have very little money even to pay rent, let alone support monks and nuns. Even if they can, they prefer to support Asian monks and not Australians.

There appears to be a preoccupation among traditional Buddhists with past and future lives. They may renounce this life to attain a better rebirth. However, the average Australian Buddhist will not renounce family and children from this life to gain a higher rebirth. This would be seen as a rejection of life and responsibility. Furthermore, some Buddhist families in Tibetan Buddhism are willing to do anything to get their son recognized as an incarnate lama. Whether they are doing this with acceptable religious zeal or an intent to gain worldly advantages is a challenging question. Due to the belief in the theory of rebirth, if someone is a gifted child, they might say 'he must be an incarnation of a great being'. This suggests that the child has to be born with the same self, perhaps with an attachment to his past life's status and abilities or at least sufficient attachment to reclaim his prayer beads. Australians find it difficult to accept the theory of rebirth, as it contradicts the teaching on impermanence and no self. When one carefully thinks about the concept of rebirth in relation to the concept of 'no self', even the use of the word, 'rebirth' seems inappropriate. The Tibetan phrase for rebirth, *skye ba snga phyi*, means earlier and later lives. It does not say that same person is born twice or again. Even people who accept the theory of rebirth usually work for this life in practice.

Many Australians who are attracted to Buddhism are inspired by the wisdom and practical relevance of the teachings, which help one to live this life with skilfulness and wisdom. The teachings highlight the difference of intelligence among practitioners based on whether one is seeking happiness in this life, a high rebirth in the next life, or liberation from samsara. Most Australian Buddhists are happy to belong to the lesser intelligence group, who primarily cherish benefit in this life. It is an honest starting point, because they wish to improve the quality of this life by increasing their compassion and wisdom. But the traditional Buddhist teachings look down on those who practice dharma and seek benefit in this lifetime. It is said that 'if one is attached to this life, one is not a spiritual (dharma) person.' Seeking either a higher rebirth or freedom from samsara is the main purpose of the practices of traditional Buddhist teachings. But without putting this life to good use, what higher rebirth is desirable? Human rebirth is said to be the most precious form of life. Why would one go about getting another rebirth of the same, if this very life is not allowed to be made worthwhile? The concept of

different levels of intelligence is culturally irrelevant in the west, especially if one can graduate from one to the other. It was perhaps useful to control and maintain the Indo-Tibetan caste structure among the traditional Buddhists. However, there is nothing wrong with highlighting the importance of right intention to benefit others, either by doing Buddhist practices or anything else one does in this life. However, the right intention is a virtue that is not dependent on a belief in rebirth.

Based on the Buddhist teachings of compassion and non-violence, people in the west expect Buddhists to be vegetarian. Many people who turn to Buddhism in Australia are either already vegetarian or expect to become one when they go for refuge and formally become Buddhist. But becoming vegetarian is not the actual practice of cultural Buddhists who are Thais, Tibetans or Sri Lankans. Monks who are supposed to live on alms cannot refuse what is offered to them by the devotees (neither did the Buddha). Lay devotees offer carefully cooked good and healthy food to the monks out of their devotion. Since monks accept and eat meat, the lay devotees also do not hesitate to eat meat. Nonetheless, many Buddhists do observe vegetarianism on certain religious days or at Buddhist meditation retreats. Many Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists observe very strict vegetarianism for life. But some vegetarians may be intolerant of others who are non-vegetarian Buddhists. They tend to look down on them, even with some degree of pride (which is not particularly Buddhist). Ordinary Buddhists have to eat and drink as they have not yet achieved freedom from craving. So the high ideals and expectations of what a Buddhist might eat or drink is actually not always easy to follow. Some people who are vegetarian are arrogant but they fail to see their affliction. Meat is easier to see than affliction. Can this be the effect of eating too many vegetables? They may be practising kindness by not eating animals but are they contemptuous towards those who do eat meat? It is a challenge to be Buddhists who are both vegetarian and tolerant and kind towards meat eating human beings.

Contemporary society in the west and east celebrates a young and beautiful body and the culture of enjoying a beautiful form or art is what makes us human beings living in the desire realm. Buddhist teachings on sexual conduct say many bad things about women's bodies. Elsewhere it says a beautiful body is the karmic result of having practiced patience in one's past life. It is obvious these teachings were written mostly for monks by monks. If they were written for nuns, there should be honest descriptions of the male body.

Some people in the west think Buddhist people are happier because of their religion. Because of this perception, gay people in Australia may think that Buddhism is a gay-friendly religion. But according to the traditional Buddhist teachings homosexuality is not natural and is therefore a form of sexual misconduct. However, in Buddhist monasteries same sex relations may be even tolerated while those who have sex with the opposite gender are denounced and expelled. A lay person who is genuinely trying to follow the Buddhist path may find many of the teachings on sexual conduct almost impossible to live by. Of those who try, very few do so successfully. But because of the social pressure to have a monk in the monastery, parents make decisions for boys who are unaware of serious vows of celibacy. Due to this socio-religious pressure, many repress their natural sexual

feelings and pretend that they observe all the sexual vows, while judging others unnecessarily. Do they know that judgement is the preparation for misery and effective prevention of compassion?

The underlying message from the Buddha is safe sex, not no sex. As the teachings on sexual restraint are mainly taught by monks for monks; many lay people may find it hard to see their relevance. I have met young Buddhist couples who feel guilty about having sex even though they have harmed no one. This is because they believe that their Buddhist vows restrict them not only with regard to who they can have sex with, but how, where and when they can have sex with their partner. From what I can see, sex-denying religions have created more social problems than they have solved. This is not the fault of the religion but people who idealize such practices without being realistic. The spread of prostitution in South East Asian Buddhist countries is proof of this. To most people in contemporary society, sex is an integral cause and part of this life. Most enjoy sex and have no desire to abstain from it. In contrast, there are some monks who chose monkhood because they enjoy respect and may even be celibate at times. Contrariwise, both sex and respect can be equally dangerous if they are abused. To deny sex seems to reject a natural part of life and one's humanness. Seeking respect by abstaining from sex and defaming those who have sex seems to only cause further suffering to the already troubled world. Distractions caused by spiritual superiority arising from monkhood may cause forgetfulness of the virtue of compassion, particularly when grasping onto righteousness takes over.

Traditional Buddhists in Asia, and also in Australia, respect those people who wear robes over laymen, monks over nuns and monks of one's own tradition over those of other traditions. This is blatant cultural materialism. It is as bad as spiritual materialism. Buddhists respect those in robes and not lay people in the same way that contemporary Australians adore and desire a young, beautiful body over an old and frail one. They are both equally worshiping mere forms. In the same way in which the eighth-century Indian Buddhist monk, Shantideva, says perfumes are not the woman's body, one could also say that robes are not the monks'. Celibates who look down on non-celibates cause division and create a new caste system in Buddhism. For instance the Australian Sangha Association founded only a few years ago only accepts ordained celibates as its members and does not accept non-celibate Buddhist teachers as eligible members. If a lay person respects a monk, it should be because he may have some finer qualities than his celibacy or because he wears a robe. The rigid Buddhist teaching on sexual morality may itself become an obstacle that prevents the dharma from reaching the vast majority who may otherwise benefit from Buddhist teachings. A liberal interpretation of the teaching on sexual conduct based on the middle path is long overdue.

Attachment to cultural Buddhism is revealed when various Buddhist traditions meet in the west and do not approve of each other's Buddha, chanting, prayer or architecture. This happens even between Buddhists from Sri Lanka and Thailand. Many cultural Buddhists have not received any teachings on tolerance or openness. They are often trapped in their own cultural attachment to doing things in a particular way, to the extent that they cannot rejoice in the practices of their

fellow Buddhists. The extent of the narrow mindedness of cultural Buddhists will fail to inspire others to embrace Buddhism. People expect Buddhists to be tolerant and the lack of this can definitely make impatient westerners want to have their own form of Buddhism without a sound understanding.

Teaching Buddhism in Australia, as with anywhere in the world, is not about converting people to Buddhism. It is about sharing Buddhism with people so that they become more loving, kind and wise. This is why His Holiness the Dalai Lama emphasizes that people should not hurry into changing their religious and cultural ways even if they draw inspiration from Buddhism. Flexibility will meet all the challenges described in this chapter and can only benefit the world. Rigidity and egotism has never helped anyone. The challenge is how to avoid these by remembering the Four Seals of Dharma and moving away from cultural Buddhism to promote peace on earth in this very life. If Buddhists work to bring peace to the world, even those in heaven may return to earth to help correct mistakes of creation.

It will be useful to promote Buddhism in a way that works well in Australia, but which may be different from the way it is taught and practised in Asia. However, one may face criticism from the conservative if one uses different ways to teach Buddhism. Those who have no new ideas will remain set in their old ways and accuse the pragmatics for making teachings inauthentic. But some traditional teaching styles, however authentic they are, fail to work in a new environment. One has to remember that one is not teaching illiterate villagers somewhere in rural Thailand who can only repeat chanting after monks. Buddhist teachers living in the west will need to gain maturity to adapt the teachings to fulfil the need of the changing society we live in. Perhaps this is the reason that the majority of the leading Tibetan Buddhist teachers in the west are ex-monks and only a few traditional monks do well as teachers – those who are pragmatic and open minded.

This is not to say that they are no great Buddhist teachers who are in robes, living in the west. Even many popular Buddhist teachers of Theravada backgrounds living in the west are lay people, although they were formerly monks. A secular form of Buddhism will need to be humanistic, pragmatic and practical and should not be against enjoying life. Buddhism and its high morals will always be respected, but contemporary society is seeking a religious philosophy that can bring wisdom to everyday life's difficulties and promote an earthly benefit before reaching nirvana of any kind. The role of women should also not be ignored, but respected. The reluctant traditionalists who oppose introduction of bhikkhuni ordination are still living in the dark ages and have forgotten that everything is subject to change. The conflicting and rigid views on vinaya were some of the many causes of the disappearance of Buddhism from India. Although this is only a preliminary survey, it may help to raise awareness of issues to be considered by those who wish to invent a relevant and effective method to develop and promote a more secular and humanistic form of Buddhism that will cure all sufferings in any culture. Small nirvana in this life will be popular. People will not be so afraid of a religion that promotes kindness and tolerance over dogmatism and idealism.

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