

# Introduction

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A sustained study of “Buddhism” reveals that the term does not refer to a simple monolithic phenomenon; instead, Buddhism is complex and manifold. Indeed, due to the rich variety of cultural productions (texts, practices, sociological structures, artistic expressions) and ideologies that fall within the category, it is better to conceive of Buddhism pluralistically. That is, Buddhism is better understood as *Buddhisms*. Moreover, while Buddhism is historic, it has never been static, nor is it now a vestige of a bygone era. Buddhism is and always has been a dynamic array of traditions. This volume represents this plurality and dynamism by exploring multiple Buddhist expressions in different historical and cultural contexts.

This anthology has the overarching aim of bridging specialist research in Buddhist studies and the needs of undergraduate educators in the humanities. There are two interrelated methods for reaching this goal. First, we intend to demonstrate that an academic study of Buddhism is more comprehensive and cogent when it is approached interdisciplinarily. Second, we intend to advance methodological considerations of how best to incorporate Buddhist content into undergraduate teaching. Making use of multiple repertoires of resources and disciplinary frameworks, this volume introduces readers to the religious and philosophical dimensions of Buddhism, the cultural and social dimensions of Buddhist religion, and historical transformations of Buddhist theory and practice.

Contributors to this volume consider first what college instructors and students need in order to incorporate Buddhist studies into their curricula. And then they consider how they might bring their disciplinary

expertise to open new approaches to scholarship on Buddhism. With these intentions, we are seeking to help other academics, especially nonspecialists, to broaden their understandings of how Buddhism has shaped and been shaped by cultures and societies over the course of its spread across Asia.

Chapter 1 begins the collection with Andy Alexander Davis's sustained argument and bibliographic resource for incorporating Buddhist primary texts (in English translation) into one's study and teaching of Buddhist philosophy. Davis introduces the complexities of Buddhist canonical and ancient apocryphal texts. Buddhist primary material is vast and complex; nonetheless, Davis argues, teachers and students of Buddhism will gain greater and clearer visions of Buddhism through the study of its primary source texts. Davis provides a comprehensive survey of the appropriate material that is now available in English translation. The survey serves as an effective heuristic for organizing, categorizing, discussing, and analyzing Buddhist canonical and apocryphal material.

The discussion of primary source material continues in the second chapter with Ann Pirruccello's investigation of Chan/Zen dialogue encounters as a means for studying Mahāyāna Buddhisms in East Asia. Pirruccello takes up hermeneutic methods of comparative philosophy by foregrounding the inherited philosophical horizons (tacit interpretive prejudices) that may serve as roadblocks and dead ends for interpreting the texts and ideas of East Asian Chan traditions. In sum, Pirruccello's piece provides a systematic exposition of primary source materials and a critical method for engaging with them.

Chapter 3 turns to pedagogy for teaching Pure Land Buddhism in a university/college setting. In this chapter, Kendall Marchman provides a crucial introduction to the major figures, texts, and concepts of Pure Land Buddhism. Marchman provides a critique of reifying Buddhism as a "world religion" and advances methods for educators and students alike to take up a critical study of this tradition of Buddhist thought and practice. In addition to outlining the essential texts and concepts of the Pure Land tradition, Marchman further advances thought experiments for educators and students to apply to their own critical studies of this current in the broad stream of Buddhist traditions.

From the textual and ideological study, the inquiry then shifts to the transformation of Buddhist imagery as it was transmitted over space, time, languages, and cultures—from India into China. In chapter 4, Jacqueline Chao investigates graphic representations of serpentine spirits, *nāga*, in Indian Buddhist imagery, and their transformation into the Chinese

cultural iconography of dragons, *long*. In her detailed analysis of artistic method and theory, Chao studies the diversification of Buddhisms as they were adapted and represented by artists and audiences in different cultural-aesthetic contexts.

In chapter 5, R. Keller Kimbrough uses the teaching of a Buddhism-in-context approach to introduce students to medieval Japanese Buddhist beliefs “as they were held and practiced by particular people” in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Japan by examining literature, art, and drama from that period—a puppet play, *Amida’s Riven Breast* (ca. 1614), and a late-medieval prose fiction work, *The Tale of Tameyo*. The two works exemplify the horrific and extreme instances of abandoned, orphaned children’s self-sacrifice to the point of death for the sake of their missing or dead parents’ Buddhist spiritual well-being in the next realm, constituting the upper limit of acceptable horror in medieval Japanese Buddhist fiction.

Chapter 6 poses the question: To what extent does a gift system require return and establish forms of social obligation? In this chapter Jessica Falcone uses anthropological theories and methods to investigate the Buddhist practice of gift-giving. Falcone examines the robust South Asian studies literature that argues that karmic gifts are “free” (not returned). Leaning heavily on Derrida’s theory of the gift and anthropological evidence from Buddhist cultures, this chapter, written from an Indian classical Buddhist and contemporary Tibetan Buddhist perspective, challenges the misperception that the doctrine of no-self makes a Buddhist gift “free.”

Geoff Ashton shows in chapter 7 that the notion of a socially engaged Buddhist rests on precarious grounds. Buddhist philosophy contends that human individuals do not really exist—the human person is just a fabrication of the mind. Buddhist spiritual practices, meanwhile, convey direct experience of the illusoriness of individual persons (including oneself) and emphasize detachment from worldly involvements. How, then, can a Buddhist ease the suffering of other persons if one has renounced ownership of one’s own self—either through withdrawal into monastic life or blind allegiance to an external agency (e.g., a political institution)? Ashton responds to this puzzle by critically examining two models of socially engaged Buddhist philosophy in the twentieth century, namely, the philosophy of D. T. Suzuki and the philosophy of Buddhādāsa, respectively. In his critical reconstruction of these two models, Ashton advances a creative response to the question: Is Buddhādāsa’s version of socially engaged Buddhism subject to the same criticisms as Suzuki’s call to action?

Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox begins his discussion in chapter 8 by noting that teachers of surveys on Buddhist Asia often neglect Vietnamese Buddhism. He reasons that this is not only because Buddhism in Vietnam is awkwardly situated between East and Southeast Asian cultures and between the so-called Theravāda and Mahāyāna practices, but also because of a dearth of comprehensible and easily accessible resources in English on Vietnamese Buddhist practices prior to the twentieth century. This chapter outlines how one might teach the history of Vietnamese Buddhism through the exploration of five major themes: 1) The development of Vietnamese Buddhism from both East and Southeast Asian sources; 2) The premodern tendency to emphasize continuity with Chinese practices through the establishment of lineages for the Vinitaruci, Vô Ngôn Thông, and Thảo Đường “schools” of Buddhism in Vietnam, which were designed to resemble practices to the north; 3) The use of Thiên (Chan/Zen) Buddhism in producing a model of Buddhist kingship in Vietnam during the Lý (1009–1225) and Trần (1225–1400) dynasties; 4) The subsequent rejection of “Chinese models” in favor of a view of Vietnamese Buddhist practice as entirely autochthonous; and 5) The importance of politically engaged Buddhist practices during the French Colonial era, the Vietnam Wars, and in the era of economic renovation.

Our discussion concludes by returning full circle to the pedagogical focus of the present volume, illustrating the interdisciplinary and pluralistic nature of Buddhist studies by arguing that in the spectrum of teaching Buddhism in an American college classroom, it is possible to teach an entire course on Buddhism from a variety of disciplines such as religion, history, archeology, philosophy, art, or literature, if one’s institution has degree programs such as Asian studies or world religions, and one happens to be the area specialist within such a program. However, at the other end of the spectrum, there are college instructors who are faced with the option of introducing limited aspects of Buddhism within already-established humanities courses. In the program from which this volume originates, there were several participants’ final projects that focused on developing sample course syllabi incorporating aspects of Buddhism into already-existing humanities courses. Approaches range from a world literature course that focuses on a single text (such as Ruth Ozeki’s novel *A Tale for the Time Being*, supported by canonical Buddhist texts and films that explore the nature of the self, of time, and of reality) or a freshman composition course framed around the various works of a single author (such as the poetry and novel excerpts of Jack Kerouac) to a freshman

seminar course that examines and compares the generation of meaning and significance within Buddhist and Christian rituals surrounding the creation of sacred spaces. This last chapter, by Jane Collins, “Not Knowing Is Most Intimate,” illustrates how one may teach an English literature course using key Buddhist concepts, canonical texts, and popular culture films to dovetail into the exploration of themes in the humanities.