

## Book Review

***Journal of Global Buddhism 4 (2003): 38 - 45***



***Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia.*** Edited by

Charles S. Prebish, and Martin Baumann.

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, xi + 424 pages,  
ISBN 0-520-23490-1 (paper), \$21.95; ISBN 0-520-22625-6  
(cloth) \$54.95.

Reviewed by

Kay Koppedraye

*Department of Religion and Culture*

*Wilfrid Laurier University*

[kkoppedr@wlu.ca](mailto:kkoppedr@wlu.ca)

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ISSN 1527-6457

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*Westward Dharma* is the latest volume of a growing body of works on Western Buddhism; both its editors, Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann, have figured prominently in other works on North American and European Buddhism as editors and contributors to earlier volumes. As explained in the introduction to *Westward Dharma*, this collection of essays is an outcome of an invigorating session at the 1998 meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Traces of the charged atmosphere of that meeting and the ensuing collaborations it engendered are evident in this volume; several of its essays show a self-conscious awareness that the study of Buddhism in North America, in Europe, and in other places outside of Asia has implications for the way Buddhist studies has been and will be done. They suggest that the recognition of new configurations of Buddhist expressions resulting from adaptations, adoptions, appropriations, immigration patterns, and so on demands the use of new theoretical frameworks, approaches, analytic tools, and ways

of doing scholarly work. In short, the cumulative work being done on Buddhism outside of Asia constitutes a new subfield of Buddhist Studies.

Through its various essays *Westward Dharma* contributes to this corpus by situating Western Buddhism in a more global perspective, but more importantly, in its organization, range of coverage, and in its choice of contributors and the areas they address, it alerts readers to the developments taking place within this new subfield. As such, the volume is more than just a forum for the dissemination of scholarly work; it opens out to include its readers in the larger and perhaps more significant discussions of how this field of study is being shaped, and what its participants must attend to along the way. Here, underneath the rich material the essays provide, are larger, meta-theoretical questions of how to go about thinking about this area of study. Credit needs to go to the editors whose decisions, as seen in this work, reveal their attentiveness to these questions. More than just contributors to or commentators on this area of study, individually and also in collaboration with each other in other projects, Prebish and Baumann have helped define and conceptualize this field. This volume shows the outcome of that sustained conceptualization.

The lay-out of the work maps out the terrain of this subfield. The volume is organized into five discrete sections, each containing a set of four, in one case five, focused studies that explore typological and theoretical questions related to the idea of "Western Buddhism" and its study; that chart out the trajectories of Buddhist history in various regions; that address the ways discrete Buddhist traditions are being shaped outside of Asia; that probe some of the practical, ethical, and religious concerns that have arisen out of this development; and that consider the intersections with other domains of thought, such as aesthetics,

feminism, social activism, and the therapeutic preoccupations that have influenced the nature of Buddhist thought and practice in Western countries.

The first section opens up with set of essays that identify ongoing preoccupations of scholars of contemporary Buddhism. In a revised version of a provocative response to the question, *Who is a Buddhist?*, Thomas Tweed addresses and refines earlier typological concerns by pointing out that questions of religious identity often operate in a murky terrain complicated by various affiliations, sympathies, adherences, and so on. Tweed's plea is that scholarship attend more to these nuances. B. Alan Wallace, in a survey of the range of Buddhist practices in the West, takes note of some general and shared trends that signal transformations within the Buddhist tradition as it takes root in countries outside of Asia. Martin Baumann's essay furthers the analytic framework by suggesting that sensitivity to the contrast between what he calls "traditionalist and modernist Buddhism prevalent in non-Asian as well as in Asian settings" (52) will offer an approach that will enable researchers to think beyond ethnicity and countries of origin and to consider instead the processes and circumstances that engender new interpretations, practices, and teachings, whether conservative or innovative. The final essay in this section is Charles Prebish's assessment of this new subdiscipline. Prebish takes up the questions of what constitutes a field of study, or a subdiscipline, and what the critical components are necessary for such a field. Drawing upon the demographics of scholarly enterprise and academic training he has documented in two extensive surveys, in bibliographic analyses, and by other means, he marshals ample evidence to suggest that by the mid-to-late 1990s, a critical mass had been reached to merit recognition of "Western Buddhism" as a discrete subdiscipline of Buddhist Studies. Prebish's material prompts other scholars to think about the implications of their contributions to

and their locations within this emergent subdiscipline.

The essays in Part II turn their attention to the histories of Buddhism outside of Asia, with detailed studies of Buddhism in Europe (Baumann), American Buddhism (Richard Seager), Buddhism in Canada (Bruce Matthews), Australia and New Zealand (Michelle Spuler), South Africa (Michel Clasquin), Brazil (Frank Usarski), and Israel (Lionel Obadia). Together these essays draw attention to the way the idea of "Western Buddhism" is both sustained and problematized when thinking about Buddhism outside of Asia. The essays highlight different patterns of development and the heterogeneity of Western Buddhism. Each author, as well, is able to tease out salient observations relative to the particular circumstances of the regions under discussion.

The next section provides case studies that illustrate the adaptations, innovations, tensions, and accommodations that have accompanied the rooting of various Buddhist traditions in North America and elsewhere. The first essay in this section, Duncan Ryuken Williams' discussion of the relationship between Japanese-American Buddhists and the U.S. government at the time of the Second World War, points out that questions of religious identity are not only personal concerns, but can also be matters of public scrutiny and suspicion. His article examines the wartime responses and initiatives of Japanese-American Buddhist organizations, highlighting the nexus of political and social relations that bear on the ways particular communities situated and identified themselves. Douglas Padgett's piece, centered around the study of a temple serving a Thai community in Florida, considers how diasporic experience the changing social patterns brought about by migration, location and relocation — and diasporic consciousness — an awareness of the worlds their experiences simultaneously bridge and hold in tension — effect peoples' modes of "cultural productions," their religious

institutions, devotional life, and imaginative orientations. His work illustrates the necessity of inter-disciplinary dialogue with areas such as diaspora studies. David McMahan's piece on the ways Zen has been presented to Western audiences points out that conceptual distance, not only geographical distance, can result in the reconfiguration of an Asian religion during its introduction to a Western world. In the last essay in this section, on instances of abuses of teachers' authority within two North American groups, Sandra Bell identifies factors contributing to group dynamics that render a community vulnerable to ethical improprieties.

The essays of Part IV pick up questions raised in the preceding articles in their discussion of the demands and challenges of being Buddhist in a Western society. Drawing on material from his own tradition, Ajahn Tiradhammo's essay examines the way evolving community structures and processes can respond to changing situations and tensions between traditional organizational models and Western styles of personal and group interaction. Situating her discussion within the context of monasticism outside of Asia, Karma Lekshe Tsomo neatly balances an outline of the challenges Buddhist nuns have faced in Western societies with notice of what various nuns have accomplished. Sylvia Wetzel, in her discussion of Western Buddhist practitioners, considers the emergence of a new category, the lay teacher, and more specifically, the female lay teacher. And Gil Fronsdal's piece examines the ethical emphases found in the teachings of the Insight Meditation movement.

Essays in the final section of *Westward Dharma* reflect upon how the rooting of Buddhism in a global world is effecting changes within its larger orientations. Judith Simmer-Brown considers the ways women's participation and certain feminist concerns might be contributing to the development of a Western Buddhism. Christopher Queen traces the

development of engaged Buddhism within Asia and now as part of a global manifestation of Buddhism, drawing attention to the activist and collectivist impulses of this emergent tradition. Franz Metcalf, in his exploration of the interstices between Buddhist thought and practice and the fields of psychology, and the way, within the West, that each has influenced the other, urges that more attention be given to the tendency to psychologize Buddhism. Finally, Ian Harris examines the aesthetic and religious implications of the reception of Buddhist visual and conceptual expressions by Western artists and composers over the past century and a half.

The five sections of *Westward Dharma* effectively summarize the state of this new subfield of Buddhist Studies. With its identification of the theoretical concerns of the field, its sense of the historical depth both of the field and of the global Buddhist communities it is charting, and its case studies, the volume demonstrates that foundational work is complete. This field of study is moving into a next phase, producing more nuanced material and increasingly sophisticated analysis. The degree to which this volume is on the cutting edge of that work is revealed in its selected bibliography (383-99) of publications in the field. While this listing of works is not presented as a complete bibliography — the editors point out just how long a full bibliography would be and direct readers to other bibliographies published online (for example, here at <http://www.globalbuddhism.org/res.html>) or in other volumes, such as *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, and *Luminous Passage* — its purpose is to keep readers apprized of current work. That it does; well over half the some 260 entries were published in the past seven years. With its listings of scholarly resources, historical surveys, focused studies on women and Buddhism, ethnicity, gender, socially engaged Buddhism, theoretical studies, including reflections on the academic field itself, and area studies covering a wide range of European

countries, North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, and Africa, the bibliography sketches out the state of the field of study of global Buddhism. It tells us that the scholars at work in this field are not simply transcribers or census takers counting the numbers of Buddhists worldwide, but rather that they are using some finely honed analytic tools in the study of global Buddhism at the micro and macro levels.

The collective work that has gone into this project to document what is happening on the ground suggests another important concern, one that recalls other moments in the history of Buddhism, such as the early centuries when various Buddhist traditions were developing into Chinese religions. Fragmentary data of those events remain, leaving scholars to fret over the limitations and dangers of their imagination. With its bibliography and the material contained in its collection of essays, this volume, along with its predecessors, is helping create an archive in which information about what is transpiring now is collected and processed, using theoretical insights offered by a range of academic disciplines.

There is, however, one aspect of the presentation of the volume that does not quite fit. A cursory glance at the cover photograph recalls medieval India with its motifs of female figures in dance postures bracketed by musicians. An image seemingly at odds with the title *Westward Dharma*, its caption on the back cover explains the sense of dissonance: the photograph is of the ceiling of a Jain temple. Perhaps the lay-out team at the press felt something evocative of Asia was needed, but my suspicion is that neither the editors nor contributors to this volume sought that invocation. One of the theoretical conceits that informs their work is that what they are discussing is no transplanted tradition, but rather a richly complex and multi-faceted Buddhism that is developing in a world characterized by processes of globalization and transnationalism.



This work presents a snapshot of the developing analytic tools being used to tease out some of the implications and effects of those processes as related to the history of Buddhism. For sure, there are lacuna and gaps. One area implicated in this volume, but never addressed head-on, is the role of the scholar-adherent or scholar-practitioner in this project; another is the impact of new media of transmission. Another relates to how resources from a wide range of other disciplines, including diaspora studies and post-colonial studies, can be applied to the study of Buddhism outside of Asia. And there are thorny questions that might be raised about the relationship of "Western" Buddhism to other Buddhisms, and the circumstances and conditions that fuel its momentum. But that work awaits the next release in this continuing project. The quality of material in this work primes readers for more.