Introduction

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Between the months of June and November 1994, features on American Buddhism appeared in such popular print media as the *Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Newsweek, New York Magazine,* and *Christianity Today.* The *Newsweek* article, titled "800,000 Hands Clapping," focused on a varied group of American Buddhists that included John Daido Loori, the abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery in upstate New York, well-known actor Richard Gere, Mitchell Kapor of Lotus Development Corporation, Phil Jackson, coach of the world champion Chicago Bulls professional basketball team, and even rock group The Beastie Boys, who recorded "The Bodhisattva Vow," a rap tribute to the Buddhist path. *New York Magazine* went even further, categorizing American Buddhists as "Beat Buddhists" (such as Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Philip Whalen, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti), "Celluloid Buddhists" (including Willem Dafoe, Oliver Stone, and Ellen Burstyn, along with Gere), "Art Buddhists" (Milton Glaser, Robert Moscowitz, Roy Lichtenstein, and Robert Rauschenberg, among others), "Power Buddhists" (Jerry Brown), and "Benefit Buddhists" (like Porter McCray and Bokara Legendre).

Also in 1994, American Buddhism was presented as a major feature on the *ABC Nightly News with Peter Jennings* (with scholar-Buddhists Robert Thurman and me serving as scholarly consultants) as well as on *Talk of the Nation* on National Public Radio (with Helen Tworkov and Kenneth Tanaka fielding questions from a national audience). Peter Jennings's researchers estimated the American Buddhist population to be between four and six million individuals, composed of both Asian American and Euro-American ethnic groups, making American Buddhism a religious movement significantly larger than many Protestant denominations.

The flurry of national media attention devoted to American Buddhism

has continued almost nonstop since. And it's expanding. The *Utne Reader* ran a short feature titled "Buddhism American Style" in the issue for January–February 1995, and the *New York Times* ran an article on October 15, 1995, on apartments that were being turned into would-be *zendōs* for informal meditation sessions. Moreover, American youngsters are even being identified as incarnations of famous Buddhist teachers. On January 25, 1996, *USA Today* ran the story of Sonam Wangdu, a young boy born in Seattle to an American mother and Tibetan father who was identified as the incarnation of Lama Deshung Rinpoche III, a Tibetan teacher who died in Seattle in 1987.

Rodger Kamenetz, author of *The Jew in the Lotus*, a best-selling book on the Jewish-Buddhist dialogue, wrote a popular article titled "Robert Thurman Doesn't *Look* Buddhist" (*New York Times Magazine*, May 5, 1996), highlighting Thurman's role as one of the most visible members of a new breed of scholar-Buddhists, or well-credentialed academic investigators of the Buddhist religion who also happen to be Buddhist practitioners. Thurman is especially visible as one of the Dalai Lama's chief American translators, as well as being the father of noted actress Uma Thurman. Even the newspaper layout of news on American Buddhism foreshadows its growing normative status in mainline American religion. On June 26, 1996, the *New York Times* juxtaposed an article on the construction of Odiyan, a Tibetan Buddhist temple in northern California, alongside an article on the suspected Unabomber's not-guilty plea. And the cover story of *Time* magazine's October 13, 1997, edition was titled, "America's Fascination with Buddhism."

Although there is little consensus on an explanation for the growing popularity of American Buddhism in the latter half of the twentieth century, Peter Berger's perceptive comment of more than thirty years ago still seems applicable today: "Secularization brings about a demonopolization of religious traditions and thus, *ipso facto*, leads to a pluralistic situation." Berger goes on to say that "the key characteristic of all pluralistic situations, whatever the details of their historical background, is that the monopolies can no longer take for granted the allegiance of their client populations. . . . The pluralistic situation is, above all, a *market situation.*"[1] That Buddhism was able to exploit this "market situation" is now widely acknowledged. Robert Bellah, for example, has noted: "In many ways Asian spirituality provided a more thorough contrast to the rejected utilitarian individualism than did biblical religion. To external achievement it posed inner experience; to the exploitation of nature, harmony with nature; to impersonal organization, an intense relation to a guru."[2] In this complex social situation, in addition to its Asian American constituents, the Buddhist movement in America has been especially attractive to individuals from

Jewish backgrounds, as Rodger Kamenetz has pointed out;[3] to many African Americans, following the highly visible Buddhist involvement of Tina Turner and bell hooks;[4] to those steeped in the new language of the wellness movement, conversant with the works of Jon Kabat-Zinn,[5] Mark Epstein,[6] and others; and to a small but continually growing portion of the highly literate, socially and politically active Euro-American urban elite.

Not all of the attention highlighting American Buddhism has occurred in the popular press and print media. Following a profusion of scholarly publications, Syracuse University sponsored a major conference in spring 1977 with the exuberant and perhaps presumptuous title, "The Flowering of Buddhism in America." The trend has continued, expanding to include panels at professional meetings, doctoral dissertations, and even university courses.

More recently, the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley, California, with funding from the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (founded by Reverend Dr. Yehan Numata in Japan), sponsored a twelve-week lecture series organized by Kenneth Tanaka and entitled "Buddhisms in America: An Expanding Frontier" during the fall of 1994. Many of the presentations from that lecture series have been included in this volume. In January 1997, the most ambitious conference of its kind on the topic, titled "Buddhism in America: A Landmark Conference of the Future of Buddhist Meditative Practice in the West," was held in Boston, and in May 1997, Harvard University's Harvard Buddhist Studies Forum sponsored a highly comprehensive conference on the academic investigation of American Buddhism called "Scholarly Contributions to the Study of Buddhism in America."

Historical Concerns

Although it is now rather common to refer to Oriental influences in the writings of such prominent American literary figures as Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Walt Whitman, and to point to the impact of the Theosophists on the Oriental movement in America, the more specific beginnings of Buddhism in America can be traced to the Chinese immigrants who began to appear on the West Coast in the 1840s.[7] Prior to the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill, the number of Chinese immigrants was small, but with the news of the golden wealth in the land, the figure increased exponentially. Rick Fields, author of *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America,* has suggested that by 1852, twenty thousand Chinese were present in California, and within a decade, nearly one-tenth of the California population was Chinese.[8] In the Chinese temples that dotted the California coastline and began to appear in the Chinatown section of San Francisco, the religious practice was an eclectic

blend of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, and although there were many Buddhist priests in residence, a distinctly Chinese Buddhism on the North American continent did not develop until much later.

The Japanese presence in America developed more slowly than the Chinese, but had much greater impact. By 1890, when the Chinese presence was already quite apparent, the Japanese population was barely two thousand. The World Parliament of Religions, however, held in conjunction with the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, radically changed the entire landscape for Japanese Buddhism in America. Among the participants at the parliament was Shaku Sōen, a Rōshi who was to return to America a decade later and promote the school of Rinzai Zen (one of the two major branches of Japanese Zen Buddhism). Sōen Rōshi returned to America in 1905, lecturing in several cities and establishing a basic ground for the entry of Zen. Upon his return to Japan in 1906, three of his students were selected to promote the Rinzai lineage in America.

The first of Sōen Rōshi's students, Nyōgen Senzaki, came to California in the first decade of the twentieth century, but delayed his teaching mission until 1922. Sōen Rōshi's second disciple, Shaku Sōkatsu, lived in America from 1906 to 1908, and again from 1909 to 1910, but eventually returned to Japan without having made much impact. By far Sōen Rōshi's most noted disciple, and the man who made the most impact on the early growth of Buddhism in America, was Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. Suzuki worked for Open Court Publishing Company in LaSalle, Illinois, from 1897 to 1909, but returned to Japan to pursue a career in Buddhist Studies. He visited America again from 1936 until the beginning of World War II, and eventually returned for a final time from 1950 to 1958, lecturing frequently in American universities and cities.

Nonetheless, the Rinzai lineage was not the only one to develop in America. The Sōtō tradition (the other major branch of Japanese Zen) began to appear in America in the 1950s. By the mid-1950s, Soyu Matsuoka Rōshi had established the Chicago Buddhist Temple, and Shunryu Suzuki Rōshi arrived in San Francisco in 1959, founding the San Francisco Zen Center shortly thereafter. The Dharma successors to Suzuki Rōshi have continued the Sōtō lineage, while other teachers in this lineage (including one of the few female rōshis, Jiyu Kennett) have also appeared.

In addition to the traditional forms of Rinzai and Sōtō Zen, still another form of Zen has appeared in America, one that attempts to harmonize the major doctrines and practices of each school into a unified whole. This movement owes its American origins to Sogaku Harada, although he never visited the United States himself. Proponents of this approach included Taizan Maezumi Rōshi (arriving in 1956), Hakuun Yasutani Rōshi (who visited the United States first in 1962, and who visited regularly until his death in 1973), and Philip Kapleau, an American by birth who first learned

about Japanese religion and culture while serving as a court reporter in 1946 during the War Crimes Trials held in Tokyo. Maezumi Rōshi and Kapleau Rōshi have been enormously successful. Maezumi Rōshi established the Zen Center of Los Angeles, where he resided until his death in 1995. He left a dozen Dharma heirs, many of whom have developed their own vital, creative communities. Kapleau Rōshi too was quite successful, having built a stable Zen community in Rochester, New York, that was notable for its attempt to develop an American style for Zen practice; it recently celebrated its thirtieth anniversary. Other significant teachers are Robert Aitken Rōshi, who founded the Diamond Sangha in Hawaii in 1959, Eidō Shimano Rōshi, who first came to the United States as a translator for Yasutani Rōshi, and Joshu Sasaki Rōshi, who founded the Cimarron Zen Center in Los Angeles in 1966 and the Mount Baldy Zen Center five years later.

Zen was surely not the only Japanese Buddhist tradition to make an appearance in America before the turn of the twentieth century. In 1898 two Japanese missionaries, Shuye Sonoda and Kakuryo Nishijima, were sent to San Francisco to establish the Buddhist Mission of North America, an organization associated with a Pure Land school of Japanese Buddhism. Although their formation was seriously hampered by the Japanese Immigration Exclusion Act of 1924, thirty-three main temples were active by 1931. With the outbreak of World War II, more than one hundred thousand Japanese Americans (more than half of whom were Buddhist and two-thirds American born) were relocated to internment camps. In 1944, the name Buddhist Mission of North America was changed to Buddhist Churches of America. With headquarters in San Francisco, this Buddhist organization remains one of the most stable Buddhist communities in North America.

In the 1960s, another form of Japanese Buddhism appeared on the American landscape. It was known as Nichiren Shōshū of America, and by 1974 it boasted 258 chapters and over 200,000 members (although these figures were highly suspect). This group grew out of the Sōka Gakkai movement in Japan, a nonmeditative form of Buddhism that based its teachings on the thirteenth-century figure Nichiren (1222–82) and his emphasis on the doctrines and practices focusing on or deriving from the famous *Lotus Sūtra.* Brought to this country by Masayasa Sadanaga (who changed his name to George Williams), the organization set up headquarters in Santa Monica, California, where it began an active program of proselytizing. Although the group has recently splintered, it remains a formidable Buddhist presence in America, having become extremely attractive among Euro-American and African American Buddhists.

The Chinese are once again making their presence visible in American Buddhism. Although not nearly so visible as the Japanese Buddhist groups,

several Chinese Buddhist organizations have appeared in the last half-century. Perhaps the most notable of these is a largely monastic group originally known as the Sino-American Buddhist Association which, until his recent death, was under the direction of a venerable monk named Hsüan-Hua. Established in 1959, this organization has developed a huge monastery in Talmage, California, known as the "City of Ten Thousand Buddhas," which serves as the headquarters of what is now identified as the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association. Of even larger size (and quite possibly importance) is the Hsi Lai Temple outside Los Angeles, founded in 1978, and now offering a wide variety of Buddhist teachings and services. Other Chinese Buddhist groups can be found in virtually every major metropolitan area. There are approximately 125 Chinese Buddhist organizations in the United States, more than half of which are in California and one-fifth of which are in New York. The religious practice of the Chinese Buddhist groups in America is largely an eclectic combination of various Buddhist schools, combining Ch'an, Vinaya, T'ien-t'ai, Tantra, and Pure Land practices. Most of these practices are Mahāyāna-based, and a similar kind of approach is followed by the Vietnamese Buddhist groups that have begun to appear in urban areas, mostly as a result of a large influx of Vietnamese immigrants following the termination of the United States' involvement in Vietnam. To some degree, this eclectic approach can also be seen in the various Korean Buddhist groups that began appearing in the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century.

The Buddhist culture to enter America most recently is the Tibetan. Although a few Buddhist groups appeared in the West prior to 1960, the majority came after the Tibetan holocaust, during which the Communist Chinese made every effort to extinguish religion in Tibet. Following an immediate exile in India, Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim, the diaspora has widened, with many Tibetans seeking to reestablish their sacred lineages on American soil. Communities from each of the four major Tibetan sects can now be found in America, with those founded by Tarthang Tulku and Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche being especially popular and visible. The Tibetan groups are the most colorful of all the Buddhist groups now prospering in America, possessing a rich tradition of Buddhist art and a powerful psychological approach to mental health. They continue to grow rapidly, being very attractive to Euro-American Buddhists. It is no wonder, then, that they quote the thousand-year-old saying attributed to the sage Padmasambhava to explain their rapid growth: "When the iron bird flies, and horses run on wheels, the Tibetan people will be scattered like ants across the World, and the Dharma will come to the land of the Red Man."

The final sectarian tradition to be considered is that of the Theravāda, which permeated South Asia following the missionary tradition of the Indian King Aśoka in the third century B.C.E., and which continues today.

Until quite recently, most Theravāda groups in the United States were similar to the Buddhist Vihāra Society in Washington, D.C., an organization founded in 1965 under the direction of the Venerable Bope Vinita from Sri Lanka, and appealing to the large diplomatic community in the nation's capital. Now, however, as many Buddhists from Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Burma have migrated to the United States to escape the economic and political uncertainty of their native homes, there is a vigorous new infusion of Theravāda Buddhism into America. Temples are appearing in major cities, as these immigrant groups have tended to settle in ethnic communities not unlike the Chinese and Japanese communities of the early decades of the twentieth century.

Developmental Issues

Outlining the historical details of the Buddhist movement in America tells but a small part of the story, for the growth of American Buddhism is far more than its history. Rather, it presents a struggle to acculturate and accommodate on the part of a religious tradition that initially appeared to be wholly foreign to the American mindset. It is important to realize that two different groups were primarily responsible for Buddhism's earliest growth in America. On the one hand, Buddhism is the native religion of a significant number of Asian immigrants. On the other hand, it became the religion, or at least the subject of serious personal interest, for an ever-increasing group of (mostly) Euro-Americans who embraced Buddhism primarily out of intellectual attraction and interest in spiritual practice. This latter circumstance has created its own Buddhist subculture that is literate, urban, upwardly mobile, perhaps even elite in its life orientation. That bifurcation makes even the issue of Buddhist identity and membership a murky problem, further exacerbated with confusion about various Buddhist positions on ethical issues, sexuality, gender roles, and the like. This developmental pattern and the issues associated with it need to be explored alongside a careful consideration of each of the Buddhist traditions now present on American soil.

Thomas Tweed's important and influential book *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844–1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* suggests a variety of reasons for late-Victorian America's fascination with Buddhism.[9] Clearly, there was a growing dissatisfaction with the answers provided by the traditional religions of the time, and apologists, such as Paul Carus, were quick to suggest that imported Asian religions might well offer more satisfactory answers to the religious needs of Americans. Additionally, several Asian teachers, such as Anagarika Dharmapala and D. T. Suzuki, had sufficient personal charisma to advance that cause. Few Asian Buddhist teachers took up residence in America, however, and the two primary Buddhist

organizations—the American Maha Bodhi Society and the Dharma Sangha of Buddha—were institutionally weak. Tweed notes well that while Buddhist sympathizers resonated favorably with the mid-Victorian period's emphasis on optimism and activism as important cultural values, on the whole, Buddhism's presumed characterization as pessimistic and passive made a much more compelling argument for its detractors. Tweed's insightful postscript[10] suggests that, because they were also faced with the serious lack of accurate textual translations, most Victorians, however disillusioned they may have been, looked elsewhere for potential resolutions to their spiritual crises.

That American Buddhism in the late twentieth century seems to be far more extensive than it had at the end of the previous century, and far more visible in American culture, suggests that many of Tweed's postulates for the failure of Victorian Buddhism in America have been remedied. And indeed they have—especially so in the last half of the century.

By 1970, virtually the full extent of Asian Buddhist sects was represented in America, and there was a plethora of Asian Buddhist teachers in permanent residence in the growing number of American Buddhist centers. The growth of these centers has been so staggering in the second half of the twentieth century that in 1988 Don Morreale was able to catalogue nearly 350 pages of listings for these groups in *Buddhist America: Centers, Retreats, Practices.* A new edition has now appeared, aided by a register service posted on the World Wide Web. Dozens of rōshis, along with their Dharma heirs, many Tibetan *tulkus,* Chinese monks and nuns, and an increasing number of Theravāda monks from various South and Southeast Asian cultures are now visibly active on American soil. The presence of a growing number of Asian Buddhist teachers in America has been complemented and augmented by regular visits from global Buddhist leaders such as the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh.

Further, these Asian Buddhist teachers, and the gradually increasing number of American Buddhist masters, are beginning to establish an institutional foundation that is stable, solid, and even ecumenical. In 1987 the "World Buddhism in North America" conference was held at the University of Michigan,[11] during which a statement of consensus was promulgated (1) "to create the conditions necessary for tolerance and understanding among Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike," (2) "to initiate a dialogue among Buddhists in North America in order to further mutual understanding, growth in understanding, and cooperation," (3) "to increase our sense of community by recognizing and understanding our differences as well as our common beliefs and practices," and (4) "to cultivate thoughts and actions of friendliness towards others, whether they accept our beliefs or not, and in so doing approach the world as the proper field of Dharma, not as a sphere of conduct irreconcilable with the practice of Dharma."

Geographically organized organizations, like the Sangha Council of Southern California, and associations of the students of famous Buddhist masters, such as the White Plum Sangha, linking the Dharma heirs of Taizan Maezumi Rōshi, are now becoming commonplace in the American Buddhist movement.

The availability of accurate primary and secondary literature has expanded almost exponentially in the latter half of the twentieth century. Several university presses, such as the State University of New York Press, University of Hawaii Press, University of California Press, and Princeton University Press have been leaders in publishing scholarly books devoted to the study of Buddhism, and a variety of trade publishers has emerged as well, such as Snow Lion and Wisdom Publications, that emphasize Buddhism specifically. Reliable translations of the entire Pāli canon are now readily available throughout the world, and a project to publish translations of the entire Chinese Buddhist canon is currently under way, sponsored by the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai. This translation endeavor represents a significant step forward in the American Buddhist movement because it requires extensive language training in Sanskrit, Pāli, Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan. This training is usually, although not exclusively, obtained in American universities. As of 1994, nearly two dozen North American universities could boast at least two full-time faculty devoted to the academic discipline of Buddhist Studies, and nearly 150 academic scholars of Buddhism are located on the North American continent, many of whom can best be identified as "scholar-*practitioners.*" Moreover, the American Buddhist movement is aided by the presence of a growing number of individuals who have traveled to Asia for extensive training and then returned to the United States to share their approach with Americans. One of the most successful enterprises of this kind is the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, initially guided by Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, Sharon Salzberg, and Christina Feldman, each of whom received extensive *vipassanā* training in Asia.

Certainly, the issue of social and religious anomie is no less critical in the latter years of the twentieth century than it was in the previous century. A quick perusal of Theodore Roszak's *Making of a Counter Culture,* Harvey Cox's *Secular City,* or Peter Berger's *Sacred Canopy* shows how the pervasive influence of secularism and pluralism created the same kind of religious crisis as witnessed prior to the World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893.[12] Roszak even argued that the counterculture of the 1960s was, "essentially, an exploration of the politics of consciousness."[13] The counterculture of the twentieth century differed from that of the preceding century, however, in that it was no longer either passive or pessimistic, and this was clearly obvious in the American Buddhist movement.

Quite apart from issues relating to the specificity with which American

Buddhist life is manifested (lay versus monastic ideals; urban versus rural lifestyle), a distinct and unique application of Buddhist ethics, creatively called "socially engaged Buddhism," is emerging that demonstrates in dramatic fashion both the *active* and the *optimistic* approach of today's American Buddhism. The overarching approach of socially engaged Buddhism is clearly portrayed in Ken Jones's useful book *The Social Face of Buddhism*, and summarized extremely well in Kenneth Kraft's introduction to his edited volume *Inner Peace, World Peace.*[14] Organizations like the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, founded in 1978, aggressively demonstrate how to strike a careful balance between meditational training and political activism. Their task in bringing this activism and optimism to the American Buddhist public is aided by a strong new Buddhist journalism in America that has fostered exciting publications such as *Tricycle: The Buddhist Quarterly*, the *Shambhala Sun*, and *Turning Wheel: Journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship*, as well as many publications of individual Buddhist centers. In addition, the useful and productive development of the Internet has allowed American Buddhism to expand its sphere of influence to a *sangha* not necessarily limited to a given geographic space. The electronic *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, for example, in its "Global Resources for Buddhist Studies" component, has created links to literally hundreds of American Buddhist *sanghas* across the totality of North America.

Thus the faces of Buddhism in America are many. They are diverse, and enthusiastic, and active, and forward looking in their optimism. In the chapters that follow, both the various American Buddhist traditions and the issues impacting on those traditions are explored in an interesting and comprehensive way.