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An enthusiastic group of volunteers, community members and scholars gathered at Fo Guang Shan Temple in Mississauga on Sunday, May 29, 2016 to learn about the past, present and future of Buddhism in Canada.

Dr. Victor Hori was the distinguished guest speaker. Dr. Hori is a post-retirement Associate Professor of Japanese religion at McGill University. He was ordained as a Rinzai Monk after completing his doctorate degree in 1976, and spent thirteen years training at the Daitoku-ji temple in Kyoto. He is mainly interested in studying Japanese Zen; however he recently developed an interest in Buddhism in Canada. He has published two edited books on the topic of Buddhism in Canada, and continues to conduct research on this topic. The title of his talk was "Buddhism in Canada: Where are we?"

The Past

Dr. Hori began by presenting his audience with a history of Buddhism in Canada. He identified two types of Buddhism that have been developing in Canada: Immigrant Buddhism (beginning in 1905) and Buddhism for

Westerners (beginning in 1962). During the late nineteenth century, Chinese and Japanese immigrants began settling in Canada for employment purposes. In 1905, a Jodo Shinshu monk named Senju Sasaki arrived in Vancouver and began delivering Dharma talks to fellow Buddhists. Senju raised enough money to purchase and renovate an old Christian church, which became a meeting place for Jodo Shinshu practitioners. In 1911, Senju opened a new Buddhist church, which could accommodate the increasing number of Shin Buddhists in the area.

In the early twentieth century, Japanese Buddhism underwent a “Christianization” process. Japanese immigrants were wary of racial discrimination, so temples were referred to as churches, and priests were referred to as ministers. Instead of chanting sutras, church members sang hymns. Japanese Pure Land Buddhism became organized in Canada, albeit in a modified state. Unfortunately, the events of the Second World War and a subsequent increase in racial discrimination temporarily impeded the growth of Buddhism in Canada.

After the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, the Canadian government unleashed a campaign of severe persecution against Japanese Canadians. The Buddhist Church of Canada (BCC), which was established in 1933, temporarily disbanded as a result of this mistreatment. After the war, many Japanese Buddhists settled to the east of British Columbia, and Buddhism quickly began to recover. In 1946, the BCC was re-established in Alberta as the Buddhist Foundation of Canada.

Post-World War Two

The 1960s was a decade of cultural change in the West. Before this decade, Buddhism had not gained much popularity among Westerners. Attitudinal changes developed in the atmosphere of student protests, the Black Power movement, the Women’s Liberation Movement, and the

Counterculture movement. In 1967, Canadian immigration laws were re-examined and reformed. It became somewhat easier for people from Asian countries to immigrate to Canada. As a result, many different forms of Buddhism arrived in Canada. In 1971, Pierre Elliot Trudeau declared that multiculturalism would be Canada's official policy. In this context, Buddhism began to flourish in Canada. It became easier for Westerners to study Asian Buddhism seriously, and Buddhism began to penetrate mainstream culture.

Over subsequent decades, Buddhism became increasingly socially acceptable and westernized. The process of localization affected Buddhist temples. In the case of the San Francisco Zen Centre, the method for selecting Abbots became similar to the American presidential system. In 1996, Blanche Hartman became the first female Abbot at the San Francisco Zen Centre. Women became more eligible for leadership positions in temples in the Western context; whereas such opportunities would not likely have been available to women in China or Japan. By the early 2000s, Buddhist temples no longer felt pressured to appear "Christianized."

Present

According to Dr. Hori, Buddhism in Canada has moved from the "margin to the mainstream" during the last hundred years. It is associated with peace and philanthropy, and generally has a good reputation in Canada. For example, the Tzu Chi Buddhist Compassion and Relief Foundation, with its Canadian headquarters in Vancouver, is well-known for providing assistance to victims of natural disasters. In 2015, the Prime Minister of Canada gave a statement in support of Buddhists in Canada and around the world who were celebrating Vesak (a celebration which commemorates the Buddha's life, enlightenment and death). Presently,

Canadians who may not necessarily identify as Buddhist tend to adopt fragments of Buddhism in their daily lives. Some examples include vegetarianism, meditation and mindfulness practices.

The Future

In the final portion of his lecture, Dr. Hori identified some problems faced by Immigrant Buddhism and westernized Buddhism. Dr. Hori discussed a set of stages, identified by Mark R. Mullins, through which immigrant churches progress over time. During the first stage, those in leadership positions are immigrants who are monolingual in their home language. Later, the congregation is composed of the original immigrants and a second generation. Members of the second generation speak the language of the mainstream culture. In the third stage, none of the original immigrants remain, and the church becomes monolingual in the mainstream language. Out-marriage occurs, and people lose interest in preserving the immigrant church. During each of these stages, the church reorganizes its leadership and methods of operation. An example of this phenomenon is the Montreal Buddhist Church, which currently has around five elderly members, and no longer holds regular meetings. Dr. Hori wondered if there will be a fourth stage to the immigrant church dilemma in the future. Could temples such as Fo Guang Shan experience similar issues?

There are also problems associated with westernized Buddhism. The Western misinterpretation of mindfulness is particularly concerning. Westerners typically pursue mindfulness practices for self-gain. For example, one might practice mindful eating in order to lose weight. Alternatively, Buddhists engage in meditation and mindfulness practices with the ultimate goal of becoming bodhisattvas. Although these practices are initially for the self, the ultimate purpose is to benefit others.

This purpose has been lost in the Western understanding of mindfulness. How will such misunderstandings affect Buddhism's future in Canada?

After concluding his talk, Dr. Hori kindly answered many questions from audience members. I am hopeful that Dr. Hori's research will help Buddhist organizations in Canada to thrive in the future. I am sincerely grateful to Dr. Hori for his engaging and informative talk, and I would like to thank Fo Guang Shan Temple for inviting me to this public Dharma lecture. Dr. Hori's talk is also available [online](#).