

Buddhist Studies in Canada

University of Toronto, Ontario (2006-2009)

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The three years between 2006 and 2009 have seen some of the most dramatic and promising changes in the shape of the academic study of Buddhism in the history of the University of Toronto. The areas these changes occurred in were those of faculty, students and endowments.

Two new tenure stream buddhologists were hired in 2006: Juhn Ahn, who carries a PhD from UC Berkeley and specializes on Chinese and Japanese Chan and Zen Buddhism, working on the “Zen illness” and relations between doctrinal history and the conceptualization of health; and the author of this short note, who did his doctoral work at the University of Heidelberg and whose fields are *Pāli* philology and *Theravāda* texts on time as well as Buddhist childhood rituals among the Newars and monastic networks between Nepal and Burma. With their work in the fields of East Asian Buddhism on the one hand and South and Southeast Asian Buddhism on the other, these two hires jointly made by the Department and Centre for the Study of Religion, the Department of East Asian Studies and the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Toronto Mississauga, complemented the previously established exclusive focus on Tibetan Buddhism so far represented by Frances Garrett who had joined UofT in 2003 and has been working on Tibetan medicine and embryology. Additionally in 2007, the Buddhist Studies map at the Centre for the Study of Religion was expanded to include Central Asia through the teaching appointment of UC Berkeley PhD candidate Amanda Goodman, who explores Silk Route Buddhist lineage history based on sources from Dunhuang.

In addition to the quadrupling of faculty numbers the introduction of both an undergraduate major / specialist and a graduate programme in Buddhist Studies led to the second direction of growth in our field, which is that of attracting a large and strong community of students over the last three years. A commitment to language instruction managed to establish both Sanskrit and Tibetan, in addition to Chinese, as Buddhist languages regularly taught at several levels. Students with strong language backgrounds are currently working, among others, on projects as diverse such as Tibetan kingship, Chinese mountain cults, “mistranslations” in Buddhist Middle-Indic, Mongolian historiography and Buddhist medicine and palliative care. Since 2007 research on topics such as the latter can be additionally conducted within the framework of the new minor programme “Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health” introduced and led by Tony

Toneatto at the Department of Psychiatry and Public Health Sciences of UofT. The hosting of the “North American Graduate Student Conference in Buddhist Studies” in April 2010 at UofT speaks of the confidence and vitality of a growing community of young researchers here.

Although already an institution where the activities made possible by the generous endowment granted by the *Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai* (BDK) have been taking place for about twenty years, UofT saw the Yehan Numata Programme in Buddhist Studies, in which UofT joins hands with McMaster University and its own young and strong Buddhist Studies faculty, emerge energized by the recent developments, hosting not only a rich lecture series with affiliated reading groups, but also a number of conferences such as on the direction of Buddhist Studies as a field in 2007, the deployment of occult technologies in Buddhism in 2008 and Buddhist training in Japan in 2009. This wealth was augmented over the past three years by two additional major donations: one in 2006 of CAD 4 million from Tung Lin Kok Yuen, Hong Kong, to UofT Scarborough, where Buddhist Studies courses have been taught by Henry Shiu, sponsoring a visiting professor, a lecture programme and regular conferences, including one on Buddhist visual cultures and one in 2010 on Buddhist diasporas; the other a pledge of CAD 1.8 million made in 2009 by the Buddhist Education Foundation for Canada to New College and the programme “Buddhism, Psychology and Mental Health”.

The fact that most of UofT’s faculty involved in Buddhist Studies are still heading towards tenure and will be able to make even stronger contributions to publishing and institution building in the years to come, the growing numbers of those interested in Buddhism enrolled in Buddhist Studies programmes or attending events both academic and of general interest and the breathtaking financial support received for the diverse activities promoting Buddhist Studies at UofT is an encouraging sign that Buddhist Studies at UofT and in Canada has at the point in time in which these lines are being written only begun to grow.