

***Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada.*** Eds. John S. Harding, Victor Sogen Hori, and Alexander Soucy Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010.

Buddhism's introduction into North America and Europe appears to be the exception to Kipling's warning that the "twain" of East and West shall never meet, and this merging—or apparent merging—is the subject of *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada*.

The title *Wild Geese* refers indirectly to one of the most famous books in the secular Buddhist canon, Rick Fields' *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Shambala Publications: Boulder, 1981). The seventeen essays in *Wild Geese* attempt to perform for Canada the same historical and sociological task, albeit in a less popular, more academic vein.

The biggest problem for the writers of *Wild Geese* is finding a terminology that clearly differentiates the, mostly Asian, Buddhist immigrants to Canada from Canadians who have abandoned their, in most cases, Judeo-Christian roots to embrace Buddhism. One set of terms—"ethnic" versus "convert"—is problematic since "ethnic" suggests that this Buddhism is somehow blemished by Asian cultural influences, as opposed to the "purer", more meditation-oriented Buddhism that attracts most Westerners. "Asian" versus "Western" only works for first-generation Buddhist immigrants. Suwanda Sugunasiri has suggested "inherited" and "acquired" as more useful terms but, as Victor Sogen Hori argues in the opening essay, "How do we study Buddhism in Canada?", no terminology is completely satisfactory (16). For example, some who identify themselves as Buddhist on the Canadian census may be second-generation immigrants, and therefore fully "Canadian" and no longer "ethnic." And there may be many Westerners who identify with Buddhism but don't report their affiliation, or, indeed, any affiliation at all, on the census. In short, the problems of definition and classification of inherited/ethnic/Asian versus acquired/convert/Western Buddhism are formidable.

As several of the essays in *Wild Geese* show clearly, these identity problems are just as formidable for the transplanted Buddhist organizations themselves. Is their mission to preserve the rites and customs of the immigrant homeland? Or is their mission to, literally, "missionize" Westerners—in other words, actively seek Western converts?

And always, in the background, is the issue of sheer organizational survival in an unfamiliar and at times racist and hostile culture.

The results have sometimes been syncretic, a merging of East and West into a new form of Buddhism that attempts to satisfy immigrant congregations while attracting, or at least not repelling, other Canadians. An example of this syncretism, in Terry Wadata's essay "Japanese Canadians and Jodo Shinshu Buddhism 1905-1970," is the Japan-based Jodo Shinshu, also known as Pure Land or Shin school. Japanese immigrants who came to Canada in the late nineteenth century faced officially sanctioned racism in the form of government restrictions, but also popular resentment and prejudice that sometimes flared into violence. The Shin immigrants attempted to "fit in" in two ways. Some abandoned Buddhism for Christianity, while others tried to make their Buddhist religion less alien by "Christianizing" its structure, so that temples became churches and priests became reverends and ministers; the group even set up Sunday schools (64-65).

The Taiwan-based Fo Guang Shan (Buddha's Light Mountain) group adopted another strategy, as detailed by Lina Verchary in "The Woodenfish Program: Fo Guang Shan, Canadian Youth, and a New Generation of Missionaries." Fo Guang Shan found that its services were too "Asian" (that is, too ritualistic and culture-bound) to attract Westerners seeking a more active, meditative path. The group's solution was a separate organization called Woodenfish that each year gives meditation training to a relatively small but highly educated group of Westerners at a temple in Taiwan. The graduates then act as mostly unofficial Buddhist ambassadors to fellow Westerners when they return home. It is not even required that they identify themselves as Buddhist: it is enough that they have learned something of Buddhism, which Fo Guang Shan believes will, over time, bear spiritual fruit in Western culture. But even the Woodenfish program has its problems. The Woodenfish retreats are highly structured, with strict rules and procedures that some Westerners find too authoritarian and self-denying (216). The irony, which is not lost on the Woodenfish organizers, is that while Asian Buddhism aims to overcome attachment to self, Buddhism for many Westerners is yet another pathway to enhancement of their individuality. Of the transplanted Buddhist organizations, Tibetan Buddhism, with its charismatic figureheads the Dalai Lama and the late Chogyam Trungpa, has been, perhaps, the most successful at pulling Westerners into its "ritualistic," culture-based orbit, thanks to promises of a strong meditative practice as well.

While *Wild Geese*'s institutional history of Canadian Buddhism is useful, the non-academic reader of *Wild Geese*, and particularly the "convert" reader, may be more attracted to the essays that deal with how and why Westerners leave their Judeo-Christian or secular beliefs to take up a Buddhist approach. These essays are that the closest in style and spirit to Fields' *How the Swans Came to the Lake* since they focus on individual, rather than organizational, struggles.

From this perspective, the most satisfying essay, because the most in-depth, chronicles the spiritual journey of Albert Low, a British seeker who abandoned his Christian roots, in turn embraced and then rejected Scientology and Gurdieffian philosophy, finally discovered Zen, and eventually became the abbot of the Montreal Zen Centre. This is an inner struggle that many Western converts to Buddhism can strongly identify with. Two other essays, one involving interviews with Westerners who joined the Toronto Zen Centre and another on the establishment of Chogyam Trungpa's centre in Halifax, also show the often difficult psychological struggle faced by Westerners as they come to grips with the otherness of Buddhism, while being irresistibly attracted to it.

Indeed, one of the "twains" revealed by *Wild Geese* is that for Westerners, the struggle is largely inward, psychological and centred on meditation; for immigrants, the struggles are more institutional and centred on establishing their familiar institutions and rituals. The essays on Suwanda Sugunisiri and Albert Low, which appear back to back, show the two different journeys quite clearly and illustrate well Sugunisiri's distinction between "inherited" (Sugunisiri) and "acquired" (Low) Buddhism. As a Sri Lankan by birth, Sugunisiri's inner struggle was not coming to grips with Buddhism as such—or, at least, an inner struggle is not described—but on his decades'-long struggle to establish Buddhism on a firm institutional foundation in Canada.

*Wild Geese* is not without flaws. Many of the essays lack details about the spiritual practices of all the groups described, details that would be helpful for readers who are not familiar with the many cultural and national variations of Buddhism. For example, it is not clear how, exactly, the Pure Land schools bring their proponents to Buddhism's ultimate goal of enlightenment. This detail is important since, as described, many of the Asian-based Buddhist institutions—Zen is the notable exception—appear to be "devotional" rather than meditative, yet many Westerners drawn to Buddhism are trying to get away from "devotional" Christianity in favor