

Research Article

Journal of Global Buddhism 13 (2012): 9-25



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Research Article

Buddhism in Australia: An Emerging Field of Study

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Abstract

In 2006, Paul D. Numrich (2008) posed the question of whether contemporary scholarship on North American Buddhism constituted a distinct "field of study" and identified several factors that defined both academic disciplines and fields. This paper applies Numrich's criteria to the study of Buddhism in Australia, in its multiple and diverse forms, suggesting that it is an *emerging* field of study. While there has been an increase in historical, anthropological, and sociological scholarship in recent years, a comprehensive analysis of Buddhism in Australia, and particularly its impact on Australian life and culture, is yet to be conducted. This paper argues that such a study is both timely and necessary, given that Buddhism is the second largest religion in Australia, and we appear to be entering an "Asian century."

The need for further research on Buddhism in Australia

While the presence of Buddhism in Australia dates back to at least the 1840s, and Buddhism is currently Australia's second largest and fastest growing religion, it has received cursory scholarly attention (ABS 2006; Barker and Rocha, 2011: 1–2).² Consequently Australians have a limited understanding of the history and significance of this major world religion in their local context (Croucher, 1989: 123; Barker and Rocha, 2011: 2). In the late 1980s, in his *History of Buddhism in Australia*, Paul Croucher concluded that:

what we are witnessing now is a Buddhism in transition, a Buddhism only half-digested. Australian Buddhists ... have as yet little or no sense of their own history, and so find it difficult to make any projections as to the eventual form this complex tapestry will take... The various living traditions of Buddhism (as opposed to merely our ideas about them) are now meeting each other on Australian soil for the first time, like distant relatives, and hence the dialogue between them is of great moment. (1989: 123)

¹ The authors acknowledge and thank Judith Snodgrass for her guidance and constructive critiques of earlier drafts of this article and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable insights, which have improved the paper.

² Barker and Rocha (2011: 15) cite the following handful of publications on Buddhism in Australia: Croucher (1989); Spuler (2000, 2002); Abeyagunawardena (2009); and a special edition of the *Journal of Global Buddhism* on "Buddhism in Oceania" (2008). They also mention Spuler's (2003a) annotated bibliography on *Buddhism in Australia* that contains a number of earlier references.

Over twenty years later, Australian participants in Ruth Fitzpatrick's (*forthcoming*) study³ expressed similar sentiments. One asks: "How is it [Buddhism] working? I don't think it's working. It's just present at the moment. I think the seeds are still in the ground. That's the way it feels to me." In 2012, understanding Buddhism's place in Australian life and culture is still very much a work in progress.

In 2006, Buddhists comprised 2.1% of the Australian population (ABS 2006). According to Michelle Barker and Cristina Rocha (2011: 1, 15) the dramatic growth in the number of Buddhists in Australia can be attributed to both Asian immigration, and mainstream Australian converts to Buddhism. Indeed Barker and Rocha have observed that Buddhism in Australia is internally diverse and influenced by its geographical proximity to Asia, Australia's multicultural policies and interactions with Buddhism in Europe and America. Buddhists from China and Sri Lanka first began immigrating to Australia in the 1840s Gold Rush period, and since the demise of the White Australia Policy and the end of the Vietnam War, large numbers of Buddhists who were refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam began settling in Australia. Buddhists from Tibet, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore also came as refugees or migrants to Australia from the 1970s onward (Barker and Rocha, 2011: 2-3). Prominent Buddhist teachers and practitioners have been visiting Australian shores since the turn of the 20th Century, attracting many converts to Buddhism (Croucher, 1989), and the Dalai Lama continues to draw vast crowds and prolific media coverage whenever he visits Australia (Barker and Rocha, 2011: 1;). Yet the place of Buddhism in Australian society has only recently begun to attract a significant amount of scholarly interest.

This paper presents an analysis of scholarly publications on the various manifestations of Buddhism in Australia to date and of developments within the field of Buddhist Studies and studies of religion more generally in relation to Buddhism in Australia. It identifies a number of themes of current relevance and argues that, while Buddhism in Australia is an emerging field of study, a comprehensive analysis of Buddhism in the Australian context has yet to be conducted. Finally, it offers suggestions for future research that would concurrently enable a greater understanding of Buddhism in Australia, and establish it as a distinct field of study.

An emerging field of study

In his Introduction to *North American Buddhists in Social Context*, Paul Numrich questioned whether studies on North American Buddhism represent a distinct "field of study" (2008: 1-2). He identified several factors that would be necessary for his question to be answered affirmatively and argued that an academic discipline was "the broader entity within which fields of study can be distinguished." Numrich identified "Buddhist studies (also known as Buddhology)" as a field of study, and North American Buddhism as a possible sub-field. According to Numrich the criteria for establishing a discipline and a field are identical, consisting of three overlapping categories:

³ This is drawn from Fitzpatrick's PhD thesis research currently being conducted at the University of Western Sydney.

(1) specialization—through scholarly training, theoretical assumptions, technical terminology, and research questions and methods; (2) organization—through professional associations, regular meetings and conferences, and academic departments and programs; and (3) publication—through PhD dissertations, articles in specialized and other journals, books and edited volumes on the specific topic, and contributions to volumes not solely on the topic—with quality controlled through scholarly peer review. (2008: 1–2)

Numrich added that an indicator of both a discipline's and a field's maturity is the capacity for internal debate and critical self-reflection regarding the coherence of the discipline and/or field that distinguishes it from others. The extent to which this maturity is, or is not, present needs to be observed across all three of the above categories. Numrich (2008: 1, 9–13) also places particular emphasis on the need for greater interdisciplinarity between the humanities and social sciences in studies of North American Buddhism, arguing that a topic becomes a field of study when "scholarship reaches a high level of cross-disciplinary productivity, sophistication, and integration."

Using Numrich's typology, this paper will argue that the study of Buddhism in Australia is an *emerging* multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field of study. At present, it satisfies many but not all of Numrich's prerequisites, however recent and current developments indicate that it is likely to fulfill all of his criteria in the near future.⁴

Specialization

Many of the observations that Numrich (2008: 2–3 citing Tweed, 2000: xv; Prebish, 2002: 74–78; Seager, 1999: xii) makes regarding specialization on the topic of North American Buddhism can also be applied to the Australian context. As in North America, it is possible to identify an expanding number of scholars who have either specialized or currently specialize in studies of Buddhism, in this case in Australia. They include Enid Adam (1991, 1995, 1996, 2000), Michelle Barker (formerly Spuler) (1999, 2000, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2011), Gary D. Bouma (1996a, 1996b, 2000), Sally McAra (2007, 2009, 2011), Patricia Sherwood (2001, 2003, 2011), Judith Snodgrass (2001, 2004, 2005, 2007), Shiva Vasi (2000, 2004, 2006, 2011), and Glenys Eddy (2007, 2011). However, some of these scholars do not publish primarily on Buddhism in the Australian context. For instance, Bouma's research is mainly focused on sociology of religion in Australia more generally, although he has undertaken some research on Vietnamese Buddhism specifically. Moreover scholars of Buddhism in Australia, like North America, are from a variety of

⁴ The authors have applied Numrich's typology to the study of Buddhism in Australia largely uncritically, given that they view it as a comprehensive and extremely helpful framework for assessing the state of academic engagement on Buddhism in Australia. As one reviewer suggested, similar analyses could be conducted in other contexts, such as Europe, or Asia. The authors hope that this paper stimulates further discussion and debate, which could include critiques of, or at least elaborations upon, Numrich's criteria. This however is beyond the scope of this paper.

disciplines including History (i.e. Snodgrass), Sociology of Religion (i.e. Bouma), and Anthropology (i.e. Rocha, McAra). It can therefore be observed that the field of study is multidisciplinary.

In addition, many Australian scholars, similar to their North American counterparts, are increasingly considering Buddhism in their society as a primary or secondary research specialization. However as Buddhism in Australia is a relatively new field it can be argued that there is still "a residual snobbery that this topic does not constitute 'real Buddhist Studies'" (Numrich, 2008: 2 citing and quoting Prebish, 2002: 75). Given that the founders of the Australasian Association of Buddhist Studies (AABS), at its inception in 2005, prioritized the importance of multidisciplinary research, and the need to focus on studies of Buddhism in contemporary society in addition to philology, perhaps this is less of an issue in Australia than in North America.⁵

However, while key works on American Buddhism have been conducted by Buddhologists, there are no "traditional" Buddhologists or philological-based scholars researching Buddhism in Australia. This is distinct to the American situation. These points are further elaborated upon in the following section on Organization, which describes the foundation of the AABS in detail and also includes a discussion on interdisciplinarity.

Numrich (2008: 3) also observed that "the theoretical assumptions, technical terminology, and research questions and methods necessary to a specialization are at an early stage of formation" in North American Buddhism. Indeed, the theoretical frameworks applied to the study of Buddhism in Australia have thus far largely been adapted from North American and European scholars, notably Martin Baumann and Charles Prebish, and Australian scholars are yet to develop their own frameworks for understanding Buddhism in their local context. However, what can be observed is that different theoretical frameworks and methods are being applied to the study of Buddhism in Australia by scholars from different disciplines resulting in a new multidisciplinary category of research, enriched by the diverse theoretical perspectives and methods utilized by historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists.

As Martin Baumann (2011: xv) describes in his preface to Rocha and Barker's (2011) *Buddhism in Australia: Traditions in Change*, during the past two decades numerous studies have focused on "the development, transformation and current status of Buddhism" in so-called Western societies of North America and Europe. According to Barker and Rocha (2011: 10 citing Baumann, 1995; Tanaka, 1998; Prebish, 1999; Queen, 1999; Prebish and Baumann, 2002; Wallace, 2002), these studies have identified a number of characteristics while observing Buddhism in Western societies, although there are significant variations in the emphasis and presence of these characteristics in each context. Debates have emerged as to whether these typologies describe actual or imagined characteristics, issues that no doubt require further empirical testing. These characteristics include:

⁵ Judith Snodgrass, personal communication to the authors, 28/11/12

the plurality of Buddhist traditions in a single country, a diversity of practice for those who converted and those who were born into the religion, blurring of monasticism and lay practice with the consequent diminished role of Buddhist monastics, equality for women, application of democratic principles, emphasis on ethics, secularization (this includes the emphasis on the rational nature of Buddhism and its congruence with Western sciences). (Barker and Rocha, 2011: 10)

Barker and Rocha (2011: 11) also cite Spuler (2000: 38–40; 2003b) as identifying many of these characteristics within Buddhism in the Australian context including:

a diversity of traditions and lineages, a differentiation between ethnic and convert Buddhism, an emphasis on lay practice, on the application of democratic principles (exemplified by the existence of elected councils), some emphasis on social engagement, and some emphasis on secularization.

Barker and Rocha's (2011) introduction within their book on *Buddhism in Australia*, and the chapters contained within this text, begin to raise some issues regarding the application of these North American and European frameworks to the Australian context. For example, an interesting additional characteristic identified by Barker and Rocha (2011: 13 citing Davis, 2011, Bowen, 2011) is anti-authoritarianism, as evidenced in the ways that Australian convert Buddhists in particular have trouble with the authoritarian aspects of Zen and Soka Gakkai. Australian scholars investigating Buddhism in contemporary Western societies are also aware of, and becoming increasingly engaged in, an emerging debate pertaining to terminology and theoretical frameworks of Western and American Buddhism (Tweed, 2011; Prebish, 2011; Mitchell, 2008), modern (Lopez, 2002; McMahan, 2008) and postmodern (Baumann, 2001; McMahan, 2008) Buddhism, multiple modern Buddhisms (Quli, 2008, 2010), Buddhism and regionalism (Wilson, 2009a, 2012; Prebish, 2011), and also the long standing debate regarding convert and ethnic Buddhism (Numrich, 1996, 2003; Cadge 2004, 2005; Wilson, 2009a, 2009b; Hickey, 2010).

Due to the plurality of different forms of Buddhism in Australia and the increasingly globalized and interconnected nature of contemporary societies, Australian scholars are also focusing on global flows of Buddhism in (and out of) Australia, drawing on the work of Baumann (2001) and Rocha (2006). As Barker and Rocha (2011: 2, 15) argue: "the development of Buddhism in Australia does not happen in a vacuum, but is part of an intense flow of ideas, teachers, students, practices and material cultures between Australia and other countries" and that "the result is the existence of many Buddhisms in Australia: traditions that are in a state of change." As Prebish (2011: 247–248) has noted the increase of "global Buddhist dialogue," through websites, blogs and international conferences and associations enables "productive boundary crossing" and there is no doubt that Australians have played an active part in these developments, particularly given that Prebish's favorite website BuddhaNet (www.buddhanet.net), which connects Buddhist communities and scholars globally, was created in Australia.

As with Numrich's (2008: 3) conclusion regarding specialization in Northern American

Buddhism, these developments provide some evidence of preliminary conceptual negotiations within the emerging field of Buddhism in Australia, rather than indicators of the field's maturity, characterized by the capacity for internal debate and critical self-reflection. Further research, publications, and conferences will be required for it to reach this stage.

Organization

Numrich (2008: 3–4) stated that the field of North American Buddhism was yet to develop organizational coherence and independence through professional associations, regular meetings and conferences, and academic departments and programs. While a similar observation can be made in the Australian context, recent organizational developments indicate that a distinct field of study is in the process of being established.

The Australasian Association of Buddhist Studies (AABS) was formed in collaboration between the University of Western Sydney and The University of Sydney in 2005. While the organization is not primarily focused on studies of Buddhism in Australia by any means, many of the seminar papers presented over the last 6 years, and in the UWS seminar series that it evolved from, have been concerned with aspects of Buddhism in Australia, its manifestations, its practices, and its pedagogy.

The founding of the AABS is itself indicative of the changing face of Buddhism in Australia. AABS developed out of a regular seminar series initiated by Adrian Snodgrass when he was appointed Adjunct Professor at the Centre for Cultural Research (CCR),⁶ University of Western Sydney in 2002. It aimed to provide a multidisciplinary academic forum for the study of Buddhism that recognized and highlighted new directions in the field, the shift away from traditional textual analysis towards the cultural, social, and historical perspectives, and the recognition of its circulation in everyday life. Although philological studies remained dominant in the established institutions (ANU, Sydney), the UWS experience indicated that Buddhism was being studied across the university in areas as diverse as communications, business, art history, film studies, psychology and sociology. CCR hosted it in part because of its commitment to the communities of Greater Western Sydney, which included many ethnic Buddhists, and links it established with them through an ARC funded research project associated with the art exhibition, "Buddha: Radiant Awakening" (discussed below). Although there were no specifically Buddhist units being taught at the University, staff and student interest inserted it across the academy. The call for expressions of interest in membership, and the conferences held since the inauguration of AABS showed that UWS was by no means unique in this.⁷

AABS is a professional academic association of Buddhist scholars working across Australia and New Zealand. Until very recently, regular monthly seminars, meetings, and conferences were held in Sydney, with the association supporting travel for

⁶ Recently renamed the Institute for Culture and Society (ICS).

⁷ Judith Snodgrass, *personal communication to the authors*, 28/11/12

interstate speakers. AABS provided scholarships to support attendance at the conferences by postgraduate students from New Zealand and other Australian states (AABS, 2011b). It is now taking on a greater presence in the region. The 2011 conference was held at Queenstown, New Zealand (December 7–9), hosted by Otago University, and a Melbourne chapter of the association held its inaugural meeting at Monash University in November, 2011 (AABS, 2011a; AABS, 2011d). The AABS Melbourne chapter, in consultation with AABS in Sydney, plans to convene four seminars in 2012. One of these will focus on Buddhism in Australia (AABSa, 2011). The AABS has held regular conferences since 2005 (AABS, 2011c). In 2006 two papers were presented on Buddhism in Australia (AABS, 2006). The 2007 and 2009 AABS conferences included three papers on Buddhism in Australia (AABS, 2007, 2009). This year's combined conference with the New Zealand Association for the Study of Religions contained a session on Buddhism in Western Practice, with two papers on aspects of Buddhism in Australian society (NZASR/AABS, 2011).

An earlier landmark in studies of Buddhism in Australia was a one-day conference on "Buddhism in the Contemporary World," co-hosted by the University of Western Sydney and the World's Buddhist Sangha Council, held on November 11, 2001. Over 1,000 people attended it and many of the papers were on Buddhism in the Australian context. This was an offshoot activity of an ARC Linkage Grant (1999–2002) awarded to Ien Ang and Judith Snodgrass from the University of Western Sydney, for their project *Museums, Cultural Diversity and Audience Development: A Case Study. Buddha Radiant Awakening*.⁸

More recently, Monash University (2010) held the "Buddhism Today: One Founder, Many Paths" conference in 2010 in partnership with the Buddhist Council of Victoria, and The Australian Sociological Association's (TASA) 2011 annual conference Sociology of Religion (SoR) stream contained two out of ten papers focused on Buddhism in Australia (TASA, 2011a, 2011b). The 2012 Australian Association for the Study of Religion (AASR) conference at the University of Western Sydney will also include a panel on Buddhism in Australian society, and several panels on Buddhism, as it will be a joint conference hosted by the AASR and the AABS.

In terms of organization, therefore, the rise of interest in Buddhism in Australia within associations such as TASA, AASR and AABS indicate that it is an emerging field of study, however while the seminars and panels on Buddhism in Australia at major conferences attest to the fact that interest in this field is growing, it would no doubt be consolidated by a conference devoted entirely to this topic and/or a conference in Australia on Buddhism in Western Societies, containing a sub-theme specifically on the local situation.

According to Numrich (2008:3–4) academic departments and programs need to be established in order to meet the criteria of a distinct field of study. However, the different structures and sizes of Australian universities and also the multidisciplinary nature of the field, makes it highly unlikely that there will ever be a specific department or

⁸ Judith Snodgrass, conversation with the authors, 17/11/12.

even program dedicated to Buddhism in Australian society.⁹ This need not be seen as a weakness, but rather the diversity of the field can be seen as a strength particularly given that cross-disciplinary research is increasingly being encouraged by Australian and international research councils.

It would, however, be a stretch to describe the field of Buddhism in Australia as cross-disciplinary, as yet. Numrich (2008: 9–10) states that a topic becomes an interdisciplinary field when it reaches a high-level of "cross-disciplinary productivity, sophistication, and integration." Most of the significant scholarship conducted on Buddhism in Australia has employed sociological and/or anthropological methodologies, such as the research conducted by Adam, Spuler, and McAra. Yet, some of these scholars were trained and supervised in humanities departments specializing in religion, philosophy, and history. For example, Spuler's thesis, while ethnographical and sociological in methods including in-depth interviews, was conducted in the School of History, *Philosophy, Religion, and Classics at the University of Queensland*, as was Adam's. Fitzpatrick also combines historical and sociological methods in her research. Therefore one can conclude that the field is interdisciplinary in nature, as individual scholars' work is often informed by two or more disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. However, major cross-disciplinary research on Buddhism in Australia is still in its infancy.

Interest within TASA and the AASR in scholarship on Buddhism in Australia, especially among social scientists, namely sociologists of religion such as Bouma, Halafoff and Fitzpatrick, and a desire among them to collaborate with historians and/or Buddhologists, including Judith Snodgrass, Adrian Snodgrass and David Templeman, indicates that momentum toward developing genuinely cross-disciplinary studies of Buddhism in Australia is building. This indicates both a level of foresight, given the AABS's vision of providing a multidisciplinary platform for research, and a developing level of maturity within this field of study.

Publication

The last of Numrich's three categories, publication, presents further evidence that Buddhism in Australia is emerging as a distinct field of study, though with some notable caveats. In 1998 Michelle Spuler (2000, 2003a) compiled an online bibliography on Buddhism in Australia containing some brief annotations, which she updated in 2003. It contains sixty-five entries including books, book chapters, journal articles, theses, reports, conference papers, book reviews, and websites. This bibliography has been recently revised and updated by Ruth Fitzpatrick, Anna Halafoff and Kim Lam (2012) for the purposes of this paper, and divided into sections drawing upon Numrich's (2008: 3) typology of publications. This updated bibliography comprises fifty-seven entries that

⁹ Judith Snodgrass first made these observations in her paper "Teaching Buddhism in Australian Universities" at the August 2007 AABS seminar, University of Sydney and in subsequent conversations and correspondence with the authors in January 2012.

were included in Spuler's bibliography¹⁰ and another seventy-six entries of works published since 2003: 133 entries in total.¹¹ These entries include: books (sole-authored and edited volumes) (10); book chapters (39); journal articles (refereed) (27); Honors, Masters and PhD Theses (13); journal articles (community based) (20); other publications (including community publications, non-refereed conference papers and reports) (9), Documentaries (10) and Websites and blogs (5).

In terms of quantity of publications, therefore, a strong case can be made that the study of Buddhism in Australia constitutes a distinct field. There are, however, some questions regarding the quality of published material. Croucher's (1989) *A History of Buddhism in Australia* provides the most comprehensive chronological account available of Buddhism in Australian society from tales of early contact between Indigenous Australians and Buddhist traders, up until the late 1980s. It covers both ethnic and convert communities¹² to the extent that they were part of Australian society three decades ago. For lack of any more recent publication, Croucher's study remains the definitive text on the topic, and many of the subsequent publications cited above draw on Croucher as their primary source of information. This is in itself rather problematic. The fact that it is more than twenty years old is a significant cause for concern, not least because the years since its publication have seen major changes in the Buddhist population in Australia in terms of ethnic mix and cultural change. In addition, while undoubtedly impressive in scope, Croucher's monograph was based on his Bachelor of Arts Honors thesis and was thereby constrained by the demands and limitations of that particular exercise. It is time, as Croucher himself agrees, to update and revise his seminal work.¹³

More recently, Rocha and Barker (2011) edited a collected volume entitled *Buddhism in Australia: Traditions in Change*. The editors invited contributions from both academics and practitioners with the aim of capturing a spectrum of views on the variety of manifestations of Buddhist practices in the country. Academic chapters are deliberately juxtaposed with personal reflections of Buddhist monastics and teachers living in Australia. While it is a refereed collection, many of the personal reflections are, by nature, largely subjective, and while they offer valuable insights on the topic, there is a

¹⁰ The authors have omitted Spuler's references to conference papers and book reviews – as entries within these categories seemed incomplete—and also a few references that were too general or somewhat unclear. A total of seven of Spuler's entries are not included in the updated bibliography.

¹¹ These figures have been calculated on the 27th January 2012. Fitzpatrick et al.'s (2012) bibliography is published online <http://www.globalbuddhism.org/res.html> and is constantly being updated.

¹² The authors are aware of the problematic nature of these categories, however, we agree with Numrich (2003: 71) when he states that while there is a need for creative new typologies, it 'is not helpful to criticize current typological efforts without offering viable alternatives.' Therefore until such alternatives are further developed, we continue to use the terms ethnic and convert Buddhism, cognizant of the fact that they are less than perfect descriptors.

¹³ Halafoff and Fitzpatrick met and spoke with Paul Croucher in his bookshop in Melbourne, Australia, in May 2011.

question of whether or not they can be formally classified as academic publications. In addition, *Women of Spirit: Contemporary Religious Leaders in Australia* is a collection of practitioner's reflections and *Spirited Practices: Spirituality and the Helping Professions* contains both academic articles and personal reflections. The short articles on Buddhism in Australia that appear in the *TAASA Review*, *The Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia*, are similarly marginal. While they did go through a refereeing process, they are too short to be included in the category of refereed journal publications. Taking these issues into consideration a total of seventy-seven remain as scholarly publications on Buddhism in Australia.

Many of the publications focused on Buddhism in Australia draw primarily upon Croucher's study, although it is not always adequately referenced, and Australian Bureau of Statistics data. More recent studies of ethnic and convert Buddhists in Australia combine this information with data from ethnographical studies and/or semi-structured in-depth interviews. When Spuler wrote in 2000 and 2003, she observed that very few studies on Buddhism in Western societies, including Australia, are based on fieldwork and that literature on Buddhism in Australia is scarce and focuses mainly on history, demographics and ethnic Buddhism (Spuler, 2000: 29, 41; 2003b: 4). Since then, studies on convert Buddhism, women in Buddhism and socially engaged Buddhism have become more prevalent. Indeed, seven main themes emerge from a preliminary analysis of the literature to date. These are: Indigenous Australians and Buddhism (4 – 5%); Ethnic Buddhism (36 – 47%); Convert Buddhism (44 – 57%); Women in Buddhism (7 – 9%); Buddhism and the Arts (7 – 9%); Socially Engaged Buddhism (11 – 14%) including three papers on Education; and Health, Wellbeing and Buddhism (2 – 3%).¹⁴

Spuler (2000: 34) also observed that "the vast majority of studies on Buddhism in Australia have given the different strands of Australian Buddhism [both ethnic and convert] equal attention" in contrast to North America where convert Buddhism has received "preferential treatment" (citing Numrich, 1996: xxii). However data presented above indicates that Australian trends are becoming closer to North American trends as currently fifty-seven percent of scholarship focuses on convert Buddhism as opposed to forty-seven percent on ethnic Buddhism.

We therefore argue that while the quantity and variety of publications produced since 2003 indicates widespread and growing interest in Buddhism in Australia, there is a need for more rigorous academic analysis on the topic.

Conclusions

While as Croucher (1989: 123) observed, Buddhism in Australia remains "only half-digested," we argue that the study of Buddhism in Australia is clearly an emerging field of study, as it satisfies most of the criteria identified by Numrich (2008) that define

¹⁴ As there is some overlap in themes covered within the publications the combined number and percentages total more than 77 and 100% respectively.

a specific field of study. The number of scholars who consider Buddhism in Australia as their primary, or one of their, research interests is steadily growing and a new multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary framework for conducting research in this field is evolving. In terms of organization, the rise of interest in Buddhism in Australia within a number of prominent academic associations indicates that the study of Buddhism in the Australian context is beginning to be taken seriously. The number and quality of publications on Buddhism in Australia is also growing steadily, and the level of critical self-reflection is increasing, yet despite this evidence of developing conceptual negotiations within this emerging field it is yet to reach full maturity.

There is no doubt that scholarly interest in Buddhism in Australia is building, however more research needs to be conducted in order to establish it as a distinct field of study. This research is both timely and necessary given the large numbers of Buddhists in Australia, and as we appear to be entering an "Asian century." The scale and pace of Asia's growth and transformation has implications for Australia given its geographical proximity to and many economic links with Asia, and Australia's large and diverse Asian diasporic communities (Australian Government, 2011). Moreover, the significant Buddhist presence in Australia differentiates it from other Western democracies. The second largest religion in the USA is reported to be Judaism (although this has been the subject of recent debates); in the UK it is Islam; and in New Zealand it is Hinduism. It is therefore important to investigate how this might affect Australian identity and culture. It also appears that Buddhism, commonly (mis)understood to be an entirely peaceful and passive religion, has been overlooked by scholars and policy makers in recent decades. As Buddhism is perceived to pose little risk or threat to Australian society, compared to Christian or Islamic extremism or New Religious Movements, relatively little investment has been made by state actors to develop a greater understanding of Buddhism and to assist Buddhist communities, and young people in particular, with processes of social inclusion. However, long-held fears and prejudices that mainstream Australians have toward Asian immigrants, both despite and because of Australia's geographical proximity to Asia, remain an ongoing issue since the 1840s (Croucher, 1989; Spuler, 2000: 33; Barker and Rocha, 2011: 4-7) and pose a threat to Australia's social fabric. Australia's State and Federal Governments tend to focus their resources on minorities that they view as posing a potential threat to society, rather than on initiatives that are aimed at improving majority views toward minorities. As Mann, Numrich, and Williams (2008: 37) have described, Buddhists in America hold a double minority status, due to their ethnicity and religion. This also applies to the Australian context, rendering Buddhists less visible and potentially more at risk than other communities.

As Australia strengthens its relationship with China and the entire Asian region, this shift in Australia's geopolitical focus might also be accompanied by a shift in research priorities, in order to generate a better understanding of Asian societies and of Asian communities and religious practices, including Buddhism, in Australia. It is also vital that this research be multidisciplinary in order to accurately describe the flows of Buddhism across diverse cultures, disciplines, and sectors both in and beyond Australia and the effect that they have had on Australian society.

Finally, the relative invisibility of Buddhism in Australia needs to be addressed, and this process can be assisted by more scholarly research on the subject. This research can enable communities and state actors to better understand the history and sociological significance of Buddhism in the Australian context, in order to assist Buddhist diasporic and mainstream Australian communities with countering prejudices and building socially inclusive societies. Such research would, in the words of Nordstrom (1977 quoted in Prebish, 2011: 218) and Prebish (2011: 218), thereby go beyond merely describing the scenery to illuminating the path.

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