




Special Focus: Flows and Counterflows of Buddhism ‘South of the West’: Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai‘i

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Introduction to the JGB Special Focus section, “Flows and Counterflows of Buddhism ‘South of the West’: Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai‘i.” In this special issue, we endeavour to explore horizontal flows and counter flows of Buddhism on ‘paths less travelled’ across the Pacific sea of islands, and ‘South of the West’ (Gibson 1992) rather than the usual ‘from Asia to Europe and the Americas’ story. As such, this special issue fits within the more recent scholarship on the globalisation of Buddhism that seeks to point to a more complex picture of historical and contemporary flows of Buddhist ideas, practices, objects and peoples across the globe.

Keywords: Buddhism in Australia; Buddhism in Hawai‘i; Buddhism in Aotearoa New Zealand

A magnificent bodhi tree stands near the entrance of the Foster Botanical Garden, in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. This tree is descended from the original Bodhi tree that the Buddha is said to have gained enlightenment under in Bodh Gaya, India. It was a gift to Mary Elizabeth Mikahala Robinson Foster, a Hawai‘ian woman of chiefly – ali‘i– Maui and Hawai‘i lineage, from Anagarika Dharmapala, a Singhalese Buddhist who played a significant role in restoring Buddhist sites in India and in the spread of Buddhism to the West (Obeyesekere 1976; Kemper 2015; Masters 2017).

Foster, while schooled in Christianity, had a deep interest in her own Hawai‘ian traditions, and in Theosophy and Buddhism. She came from a wealthy shipping family and was an activist in, and benefactor of, the Hawai‘ian resistance and many Hawai‘ian social justice initiatives. She read and travelled widely, so was known to many attendees of the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago, where Dharmapala was a speaker. They recommended that Dharmapala meet with Foster on his return journey to Sri Lanka, on the vessel (somewhat aptly called) *Oceania*, which traversed the Pacific Ocean, stopping briefly in Hawai‘i and then in Japan. Foster and Dharmapala did not have long together on his day in Honolulu, but he was moved by the landscape and the familiar foliage and scents, which reminded him of Sri Lanka. Their first meeting developed into a lifelong friendship, and Foster pledged to help Dharmapala with restoring the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya. She set up trusts and contributed approximately \$10 million, over 40 years, to Dharmapala and the Maha Bodhi Society (Masters 2017: 5–15, 46–49, 76).



Foster also assisted the Japanese Buddhist Jōdo Shinshū Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i, by donating substantive funds for their first Buddhist temple to be built in Honolulu in 1900. She subsequently gifted land and funds to build a second larger temple with an adjacent school for Japanese pupils. Foster was a distinguished guest at the first temple's opening ceremony and invited Queen Lili'uokalani to a special service in 1901, which generated substantive publicity internationally, elevating the status of the temple and Japanese Buddhist community in Hawai'i (Masters 2017: 59–60, 65–66).

The narrative above shows how Buddhist ideas, practices, and tree saplings circulated across Sri Lanka, India, the USA/ Hawai'i and Japan in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is an example of the flows and counterflows of Buddhism across the Pacific Ocean, and their connection with peoples in the Pacific 'sea of islands'. Tongan and Fijian writer and anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa, in his now classical essay 'Our Sea of Islands' (1994), called on scholars to rethink the problematic and limited frame of reference of the Pacific islands that constructed them as small and remote 'dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from the centers of power.' Hau'ofa (Hau'ofa 1994: 148–51) stated that, 'if we look at the myths, legends, and oral traditions, and the cosmologies of the peoples' of the region, '[t]heir universe comprised not only land surfaces, but the surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse and exploit it... [T]heir world was anything but tiny' (Hau'ofa 1994: 152).

Hau'ofa (Hau'ofa 1994: 153–54) further explained how 'our ancestors, who had lived in the Pacific for over two thousand years, viewed their world as "a sea of islands" rather than as "islands in the sea"... Theirs was a large world in which peoples and cultures moved and mingled, unhindered by boundaries of the kind erected much later by imperial powers.' Like Hau'ofa, we are interested how the presence of Buddhism in the Pacific sea of islands is connected by networks of peoples, practices and materialities, as illustrated in the story of Mary Foster and the Bodhi tree in the Foster Botanical Gardens.

Anna Halafoff, one of the co-editors of this Special Issue, first encountered this Bodhi tree and Foster's story, on a trip to Hawai'i in 2017. She immediately recognised similarities with Buddhism's early presence in the Far North of Australia. This was evident in the climate and ecology, and in material records of sacred trees, temples and cemeteries of the Chinese, Japanese and Sri Lankan communities who worked in mining, pearling, transport and sugar cane industries of Broome, Cooktown and Thursday Island, at the turn of the 20th Century, that she had begun researching.¹ Halafoff had lived in Far North Queensland in the early 1990s and was intrigued by the few pages in Paul Croucher's (1989) *History of Buddhism in Australia* on these communities across the Far North, and particularly about a Bodhi tree planted by the Sri Lankan Buddhists on Thursday Island, around the same time that Foster and Dharmapala first met. Most previous research on Buddhism in Australia has been focused on the southern states of Victoria and Northern New South Wales, and compared to North American or European contexts and not to other islands in the Pacific region such as Hawai'i (Croucher 1989; Rocha 2007; Rocha and Barker 2011).

Consequently, in this special issue, we endeavour to explore horizontal flows and counter flows of Buddhism on 'paths less travelled' across the Pacific sea of islands, and 'South of the West' (Gibson 1992) rather than the usual 'from Asia to Europe and the Americas' story. As such, this special issue fits within the more recent scholarship on the globalisation of Buddhism that seeks to point to a more complex picture of historical and contemporary flows of Buddhist ideas, practices, objects and peoples across the globe. For instance, Richard Jaffe (2019) has demonstrated that Japanese Buddhists adopted Western Buddhist Orientalist ideas of Buddhism in India to reconceptualise Japanese Buddhism in the twentieth century, and Jens Reinke's (2020) research analysed the arrival of Taiwanese Fo Guang Shan in South Africa.

¹ Soon after her 2017 visit to Hawai'i, Halafoff received an internal pilot study research grant from the Alfred Deakin Institute, at Deakin University, to lead a small team of scholars to study Buddhism in the Far North of Australia in 2018. The findings are included in an article in this Special Issue, by Halafoff, Kim Lam, Cristina Rocha, Enqi Weng and Sue Smith.

‘South of the West’: Alternative Linkages

There is much benefit in thinking horizontally. It creates more possibilities for a real global connection by pluralising the circulation of flows from an exclusive North-South axis, to one that also includes South-South, or at least semi-peripheral, connections. It offers a critique of power relations and globalisation. In an increasingly globalised world, the flows and patterns of cultural influence and absorption are inevitably enmeshed in what Doreen Massey calls a ‘power-geometry of space-time compression’ (1993: 61). That is, the issue of who holds power in relation to flows and movement cannot be overlooked. Indeed, although globalisation is a process by which dispersed places become increasingly interconnected, inequalities persist. As Ien Ang and Jon Stratton (1996: 28) have noted, global flows do not travel in empty space, but have established historical trajectories.

Global flows and counterflows of Buddhism have long histories. Each wave of circulation, movement, and transmission has been aided by new forms of technology, over land, sea, and air. Scholars have shown how Buddhist traditions, schools, and institutions are increasingly working on a global scale and how new centres of authority are constantly being created (Baumann 2001; Reinke 2022; Rocha 2006, 2012). Over time, and with processes of globalisation, these flows have become more intense. With new powerful portable devices and good internet, people are able to feel co-present with others elsewhere (Madianou 2016), as we saw intensely during the Covid-19 pandemic. Peggy Levitt (2006) has argued that ‘many religions have become multi-centered, which differs from their multi-sitedness of the past.’ By that she means that flows move ‘not simply from the religion’s center to periphery,’ but between ‘multiple new centers’. The same is true for the globalisation of Buddhism (Baumann 2001; Prebish and Baumann 2002; Rocha 2012), where ‘multi- or polycentric forms of Buddhism are emerging’ (Prebish and Baumann 2002: 7).

The place of Australia and New Zealand, in particular, has been historically ambiguously constructed as Western but geographically removed from the West, or ‘South of the West,’ as Australian postcolonial studies scholar Ross Gibson (1992) argued. Australia has long been referred to as The South Land, Down Under, The Antipodes, Terra Incognita, Terra Australis (i.e. the unknown land of the South). Located south of Asia, and settled by the British on Indigenous land, Australia has always been ambiguously positioned on the one hand as exotic and mysterious, and on the other hand as European (Gibson 1992). The myth of a white Christian Australia, is similarly problematic as it negates the reality of its First Nations peoples’ and subsequent waves of migrants’ diverse cultures and religions, in particular the early flows of migration from Asia to Australia, and especially across the Far North (Hage 1998; Bilimoria, Bapat, and Hughes 2019; Weng et al. 2021; Halafoff et al. 2021). As Regina Ganter (2005) explains, this myth is most disrupted if we ‘turn the map upside down’ and examine the Northern part of Australia, where up ‘until World War II, whites were heavily outnumbered... by close-knit Asian and indigenous communities.’ This is a region which has long been intensely diverse due to its proximity to Asia and the Pacific sea of islands, with complex ‘triangulated relationships’ between First Nations, Asian, and European peoples (Ganter 2005).

Some scholars have called for analyses of South-South linkages, arguing that once (semi-) peripheries establish connections, they will find they have more in common with each other than with metropolitan centres (Mosquera 2002). Indeed, in their colonial histories and postcolonial struggles among the Indigenous, diasporic and settler populations these nations, including those ‘South of the West’, have many affinities. Papastergiadis has called us to investigate,

new networks of connections between and within regions that have shared histories of displacement and colonisation. A new circuit that linked, for instance, South Africa, the South

Pacific and South America may reveal affinities that are deeper than those found within the North-South axes (Papastergiadis 2003: 16).

We argue in this special issue that the same can be said for examining Buddhism in Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai'i located 'South of the West', in the Pacific sea of islands.

Buddhism 'South of the West'

The Asia-Pacific region is home to by far the largest number of Buddhists internationally. While the study of Buddhism in Asia, and Asian societies has long attracted scholarly attention, Buddhism in Oceania, in the Pacific sea of islands, remains under-explored, despite significant numbers of Buddhists in the region. Most scholarship on religion in the Pacific societies has understandably largely focused on Pacific cultures and religions, and Christianity (Swain and Trompf 1995; Scarr 2001; Robbins 2004; Tomlinson and McDougall 2013; Tomlinson 2020).

The last PEW Research Centre's Global Religious Landscape study to report in detail on Buddhism in the Pacific stated that 10.6% of Northern Mariana Islands', 8% of Hawai'i's, 4% of Vanuatu's, 2.4% of Australia's, 1.5% of New Zealand's, 1.1% of Guam's and Nauru's, 0.8% of Palau's, 0.6% of New Caledonia's population were Buddhist (PEW 2012).² This is largely due to the geographical proximity of these islands to Asia, and of flows of migrants from Asia, particularly from China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, across the vast Pacific Ocean. These flows have a long history and are associated largely with mining, pearling, transport, and farming industries (Willmott 2004; Tung 2005; Crocombe 2007; Stephenson et al. 2010; Chiang 2012).

The first wave of migration from Asia to the Pacific region is said to have begun more than 10,000 years ago, from what is now China to Taiwan, and then to the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Pacific sea of islands (Crocombe 2007). These flows are ongoing, given the geographical proximity of these islands to Asia. Beginning in the 15th Century, Europeans (notably the Spanish, German, French, British) and Americans colonised the Pacific region. A major wave of migration from Asia, particularly from China and Japan, took place across the Pacific region from the late 18th to early 20th centuries, and comprised mostly male indentured labourers, who worked on railroads, sugar, cotton, and tobacco plantations, and as farmers and miners, who most often returned to their homelands (Nagata 1996; Reynolds 2003; Shnukal, Ramsay, and Nagata 2004; Crocombe 2007). Vietnamese indentured laborers were also brought to Vanuatu and New Caledonia by the French colonisers (Calnitsky 2016), and Indian laborers to Fiji by the British colonisers (Naidu 1980). Many of these workers, however, did settle and establish diaspora communities in these Pacific nations and/or fathered children with Pacific Islander mothers, and their descendants live on to this day (Nagata 1996; Reynolds 2003; Shnukal, Ramsay, and Nagata 2004; Tung 2005; Stephenson et al. 2010).

The Japanese also invaded and occupied many nations in the Pacific during World War II, and subsequently many Japanese were interned in camps in Hawai'i, the Northern Mariana Islands, and in Australia and New Zealand. Trauma from these events continue to impact relations between Japan and the Pacific nations (Carano and Pedro 1964; Nagata 1996; Perkins 1997; Reynolds 2003; Trefalt 2009).

Another major wave of migration from Asia occurred from the mid-late 20th Century comprising Chinese workers and businesspeople, who migrated to Pacific nations for economic or political reasons, and international students and tourists from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. This wave has established many Asian diaspora communities throughout the region. The fourth and current wave includes wealthier transnational entrepreneurs, the 'new Asian immigrants' from China and Taiwan, but also many workers employed by

² The PEW 2017 The Changing Global Religious Landscape study only included larger Buddhist communities over 10,000 people. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/>

them in the textile, fishing, mining, farming, construction, and tourism industries, and the education sector as students and researchers (Crocombe 2007; Tung 2005; Stephenson et al. 2010).

Relations between Pacific Islanders and Asian migrants and workers are complex, given their long histories in the region. Both were exploited by European colonialists and formed cultures of solidarity in the face of this oppression. Asian migrants and workers have however also extracted, and continue to extract, significant resources from Pacific societies. Asian diasporic communities in the Pacific region have suffered ongoing racism, discrimination and violence, often linked to their economic success and to geo-political tensions. There is substantive literature on these migration flows, particularly from China, Taiwan, and Japan into the Pacific, yet there is very little mention of the religions of these migrants or of Buddhism specifically. When they are mentioned, they are cited in relation to temples, statues of Quan Yin, festivals, and funerary practices (Nagata 1996; Reynolds 2003; Shnukal, Ramsay, and Nagata 2004; Tung 2005; Crocombe 2007; Stephenson et al. 2010; Chiang 2012).

The brief review of literature presented here on Asian migration to the Pacific region reveals fascinating patterns similar to what Halafoff et. al. in this Special Issue have observed and documented in Australia. Substantive diasporic Asian and Buddhist communities were and are still present in many Pacific nations. It is likely that a similar material record is also yet to be discovered and studied, such as historical and contemporary temples, statues, sacred trees, and cemeteries, which may well, in many places, be the sites of ongoing cultural and religious celebrations.

This indicates that further inquiry into flows and counterflows of Buddhism across the Pacific sea of islands – particularly in societies with high percentages of Buddhists and long histories of migration such as the Northern Mariana Islands, Vanuatu, Guam, Nauru, Palau, and New Caledonia – is warranted. This Special Issue’s editors intend to undertake this inquiry in the near future in partnership with scholars in these societies. For now, we present a series of articles focused on Buddhism ‘South of the West’, in Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai’i, where we and our contributing authors are located.

* * *

This Special Issue of the *Journal of Global Buddhism* includes an Introduction and five articles on Buddhism in Australia, New Zealand and Hawai’i, drawing on post-colonial theory, theories of modern and postmodern Buddhism, lived religion, religious complexity, and the more-than-human and material turns in the study of religions.

Anna Halafoff, Kim Lam, Cristina Rocha, Enqi Weng, and Sue Smith focus on the little investigated but significant presence of Buddhism in the Far North of Australia from colonial times to the end of WWII. They draw on the cultural heritage of Asian migrants in the region (museum collections, temples, cemeteries, former mines, pearling areas, and market gardens) as well as publications by historical societies and scholars. Their aim is to re-centre religious populations excluded in dominant narratives of Australia as an exclusively Christian nation in its origins. As such, they employ three frameworks that disrupt the primacy of textual approaches – post-colonial Buddhism (Gleig 2019), lived religion (McGuire 2008) and material religion (Meyer 2012; Meyer and Houtman 2012) – to highlight everyday embodied experiences and the materiality of religion. This paper then contributes to recent scholarship on Buddhism that has similarly sought to re-centre Asian voices in the early development of Buddhism in the United States (Pierce 2000; Cheah 2011; Hsu 2016).

Hadleigh Tiddy’s article focuses on one of the first Buddhist retreats to take place in New Zealand in the early 1970s led by the Canadian Buddhist teacher, Namgyal Rinpoche. It challenges frameworks of ‘convert/ethnic’ (Prebish 1993) and ‘import/export/baggage’ (Nattier 1998) Buddhisms, used in previous analysis of this event

and the spread of Buddhism in the West. Instead, Tiddy draws on McGuire's (2008) theory of 'lived religion' to emphasise the complexity and hybridity of Namgyal Rinpoche's movement. Tiddy also adds an additional category of 'seeding' to Wakoh Shannon Hickey's (2010) set of horticultural metaphors to describe how Buddhism spread to New Zealand, stressing more-than-human dimensions and applicable to other societies.

Helen Baroni's article reveals how Hawai'i was the central hub of the Zen Buddhist Diamond Sangha (DS), cofounded by Robert Baker Aitken, which expanded to branches across the Pacific region. Baroni writes that Aitken employed the Vedic metaphor of Indra's Net, envisioning 'a universal Buddhist mahasangha comprised of interrelated and interconnected local sanghas' where each was a reflective jewel. This net facilitated horizontal flows of Buddhism across the Pacific, to and from Japan, the USA, Latin America, New Zealand and Australia, blending tradition and innovation to meet the needs of local contexts. In this way, Baroni argues that the DS also exemplifies qualities of post-modern Buddhism (Mitchell and Quli 2015; Gleig 2019).

Sally McAra and Mark Mullins draw on New Zealand census and Charities Register data to map the increasingly diverse Buddhist landscape of Aotearoa/New Zealand between 1991 and 2018. The research reveals that 80% of Buddhists in Aotearoa identify with the Asian migrant traditions, and that Buddhism is the 'most trusted' religion in New Zealand. The authors stress the transnational dimension of Buddhism in New Zealand and particularly how Buddhism has travelled to New Zealand not always directly from Asia, but also via Australia and Hawai'i, Canada, and the UK. They also stress how New Zealand-born and/or New Zealand-based Buddhist teachers are also involved in teaching overseas, demonstrating multi-directional inward and outward flows of Buddhism to and from New Zealand, across the Pacific, and globally. They conclude by calling on the need for more research on postmodern and postcolonial Buddhism (Gleig 2019) in New Zealand, and in particular the 'dynamics of white privilege of non-heritage Buddhists in relation to those of Asian and Buddhist heritage' and the 'engagement by *tangata whenua* (Māori) and Pasifika peoples with Buddhism'.

Finally, the article by **Juewei Shi and Sioh Yang Tan** explores the multidirectional flows of innovation across the Pacific Ocean in the Fo Guang Shan (FGS) organisation. Established in Taiwan in 1967, Fo Guang Shan is a global Buddhist movement in the Chinese Mahāyāna tradition that promotes 'Humanistic Buddhism'. To gain an insight into how FGS temples in Australia and New Zealand contribute to global flows of Buddhism, the authors focus on the Buddha's Birthday Festival, one of the largest and longest-running regular events held across FGS temples in the region. They employ Tweed's (2011) concept of 'translocative flows' and its five axioms to demonstrate how flows of innovation do not only depart from the headquarters in Taiwan but also from the Southern hemisphere branches in Australia and New Zealand back to the headquarters and among and other regional headquarters. Importantly, in order to spread Buddhism to the general public, FGS temples adapt this event to their local societies. In this way, they develop skilful means to popularise the Buddha's teachings according to local contexts, and notably from South of the West, to the East and North.

Overall, this special issue shows that the story of the globalisation of Buddhism is much more complex and richer than it is usually told. It is one in which ordinary people practise Buddhism as part of their daily lives through prayers and life milestones (e.g., birth and death) as they travel and migrate. These practices are then embodied in heritage and material culture – seedlings, trees, temples, shrines, museums, festivals and so forth. It is also a story of movement of ideas circulating in a region that does not conform to the usual rigid North-South and East-West models. Here, we offer a glimpse of how Buddhism moves horizontally in the Pacific among Asia, New Zealand, Australia, and Hawai'i, 'South of the West'. Following Avse Çağlar and Nina Glick Schiller's (2018) work on migration, we understand the globalisation of Buddhism as 'multiscalar'. In this context, we track the movement of Buddhism and Buddhists in smaller regional towns and larger cities

on islands of various sizes in the vast Pacific region. This also means that institutions (and their religious specialists) and ordinary people (and their cultural and religious practises) are involved in the same social fields, moving and negotiating settlement within hierarchies of power through both institutionalised and informal networks. We also argue that there is much to learn from an emphasis on triangulated relations between First Nations, Asian, and European communities, evident in South-South flows across the Pacific, and on insights from researching Buddhism and Buddhist materiality in a region that is problematically perceived as peripheral. In so doing we aim to contribute to decentring the study of Buddhism in the West from the Northern hemisphere.

Author details

Anna Halafoff, PhD, is Associate Professor in sociology in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Deakin University, Australia. Her research interests include interreligious relations, religion and education, contemporary spirituality, and Buddhism in Australia. She is the author of *The Multifaith Movement: Global Risks and Cosmopolitan Solutions*, and co-author (with Andrew Singleton, Mary Lou Rasmussen, and Gary Bouma) of *Freedoms, Faiths and Futures: Teenage Australians on Religion, Sexuality and Diversity*.

Cristina Rocha is Professor of anthropology and the Director of the **Religion and Society Research Cluster**, Western Sydney University, Australia. Her research focuses on the intersections of globalisation, (im)mobilities and religion. She has held Visiting Researcher positions at Utrecht University (NL), Kings College and Queen Mary College (UK), CUNY Graduate Centre (US), and the Max Planck Institute for Religious and Ethnic Diversity (Germany). She is the author of the award-winning book *John of God: The Globalization of Brazilian Faith Healing* (Oxford University Press, 2017); *Australian Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements: Arguments from the Margins* (with M. Hutchinson and K. Openshaw, Brill, 2020); *The Diaspora of Brazilian Religions* (with M. Vásquez, Brill, 2013); *Buddhism in Australia* (with M. Barker, Routledge, 2010); and *Zen in Brazil: The Quest for Cosmopolitan Modernity* (Hawaii University Press, 2006).

Venerable Dr. Juewei Shi has authored several publications related to Buddha's birthday, including a monograph on *Parading the Buddha: Localizing Buddha's Birthday Celebrations* that is derived from her doctoral research on Buddha's birthday parades in medieval China (2012). She has since contributed to the scholarship of Buddha's birthday celebrations in Taiwan and Australia. Her interest in the topic also includes community engagement in the **Buddha's Birthday Education Project**. Juewei's interest centres on the research and application of the Buddhist dharma in contemporary situations. This guides her teaching as a Senior Lecturer in Applied Buddhist Studies and Humanistic Buddhism at the Nan Tien Institute and her directorship of its Humanistic Buddhism Centre. Juewei has been an ordained monastic in the Fo Guang Shan order since 2002.

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