

EDITORIAL

The Eastern Buddhist: 1921, 1965, and 2021

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THE EASTERN BUDDHIST SOCIETY was begun in 1921, making this year the one-hundredth anniversary of its founding. From its inception, the society has published *The Eastern Buddhist*, which is devoted, as its masthead says, “to an open and critical study of Buddhism in all of its aspects.” Due to the effects of World War II and its aftermath, the journal ceased publication in 1958 but was restarted in 1965 as *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series and has continued until today. However, on the occasion of our centennial, we have decided to terminate the New Series and start anew as the Third Series with this issue.

The main reason for this is that for the past several years, *The Eastern Buddhist* has consistently been published two years behind schedule, with the result that the publication year noted on the cover and title page have differed from the actual publication year. For example, our last issue, volume 49, numbers 1/2, was published this past January but is dated 2018. Thanks to the hard work of our editor, John LoBreglio, we are back to publishing two issues regularly every year. However, even at this pace, it is still very difficult to catch up. By changing over to the Third Series, we will be able to align the journal’s publication date with the actual year of publication.

As noted above, The Eastern Buddhist Society was established in 1921. Its founding members included Suzuki Daisetsu Teitarō 鈴木大拙貞太郎 (1870–1966; a.k.a. D. T. Suzuki), Beatrice Lane Suzuki (1875–1939), Sasaki Gesshō 佐々木月樵 (1875–1926), Akanuma Chizen 赤沼智善 (1884–1937), and Yamabe Shūgaku 山辺習学 (1882–1944). D. T. Suzuki had just moved that year to Kyoto from Tokyo, where he had been teaching at Gakushuin University, to become a professor at Otani University, where his wife Beatrice also began teaching English. The other three founding members were also on the faculty of Otani University. Sasaki, famous for his studies on Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262) and Kegon 華嚴 thought, became president of Otani in 1924 and served in that capacity until his untimely death in 1926. Akanuma, the author of the still useful *Indo bukk'yō koyū meishi jiten* 印度仏教固有名詞辞典 (A

Dictionary of Indian Buddhist Proper Nouns), was a specialist in Pali Buddhism. Yamabe, a scholar of Indian Buddhism, was also to serve as president of Otani from 1943 to 1944. It may also be noted that Akanuma and Yamabe jointly published the authoritative *Kyōgyōshinshō kōgi* 教行信証講義 (Lectures on the *Kyōgyōshinshō*), a commentary on Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō* that is still in print today. Needless to say, Sasaki, Akanuma, and Yamabe were all priests of Higashi Honganji 東本願寺, or the Ōtani 大谷 denomination of Shin 真 Buddhism.

According to the society's charter, printed in the first issue of *The Eastern Buddhist*, The Eastern Buddhist Society was established (1) to translate original texts of Buddhism into Japanese, (2) to translate Buddhist texts written in languages other than Sanskrit and Pali into European languages and to publish studies on Buddhist doctrines in Japanese and the European languages, and (3) to publish a journal on Buddhism in English. The last item, the publication of an English-language journal on Buddhism, was, from its inception, the society's most significant activity. The first issue of *The Eastern Buddhist* came out in May of 1921, with Daisetsu and Beatrice Lane Suzuki as editors. The original plan was to publish six issues per year but this proved infeasible, and from the second issue, it came to be published four times a year. The editorial found at the end of the first issue announces that the journal's goal consists of the following three points. First, it notes that although the study of Pali Buddhism was progressing rapidly in Europe and America, Mahayana Buddhism was still very much misunderstood in the West as a superstitious degeneration of the original spirit of Buddhism. Hence, one of the primary missions of the journal was to provide accurate information about this form of Buddhism and introduce its "true spirit" to the world. The second aim, related to the first, was to contribute to a deeper mutual understanding between—and the mutual transformation of—the "East" and "West." More specifically, it sought to help Western readers gain a better understanding of the "East" (by which is actually meant Japan) by clarifying the aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical influence of Buddhism on Japanese culture. The final goal was to make the results of Japanese research on Buddhism available to the global academic community.

A look at the table of contents of the first issue shows in concrete fashion how the editors sought to realize their goals. This issue begins with two pieces by D. T. Suzuki, the first being a partial translation of the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*, and the other being an article entitled "Zen Buddhism as Purifier and Liberator of Life." They are followed by articles on the philosophical foundations of Shin Buddhism by Sasaki, aspects of Śākyamuni's life by Akanuma, the distinctive features of Mahayana Buddhism by Beatrice Lane Suzuki, and a translation of Shinran's verses by Yamabe. The articles are followed by four pages of notes, focused primarily on recent Buddhist celebrations that took place in Japan, such as the thirteen-hundredth memorial service for Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 (574–622), the eleven-hundredth memorial service for Saichō

最澄 (767–822), and the six-hundred-and-fortieth memorial service for Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282). The journal concludes with a series of brief book reviews, mostly of Japanese books. Interestingly, among the volumes reviewed are seven Buddhist dictionaries, six of which are in Japanese, indicating clearly the editors' desire to publicize and share the results of Japanese scholarship on Buddhism with the world.

The contents of the first volume set the tone for the articles that were published in future issues of the journal. They invariably carried articles by D. T. Suzuki dealing with Zen or other aspects of Mahayana thought. However, even though Suzuki was clearly its guiding hand, *The Eastern Buddhist* published a variety of studies in its pages. For example, it carried works on a wide range of topics in Indian Mahayana Buddhism, not only by Sasaki, Akanuma, and Yamabe (all of whom were frequent contributors), but also by leading Japanese scholars of the day such as Murakami Senshō 村上專精 (1851–1929) and Ui Hakuju 宇井伯寿 (1882–1963). It also made available essays on various facets of Japanese Buddhism, most notably on the Pure Land schools of Shinran and, to a lesser degree, of Shōkū 証空 (1177–1247) and Ippen 一遍 (1234–1289). Works in a more narrowly philological vein could also be found, including translations of the *Avataṃsaka Sutra* and the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* by D. T. Suzuki and Izumi Hōkei 泉芳環 (1884–1947), respectively; the Tibetan text and English translation of Nāgārjuna's *Mahāyāna-viṃśikā* by Yamaguchi Susumu 山口益 (1895–1976); the Sanskrit text of the verses of the *Daśabhūmika Sutra* by Johannes Rahder (1898–1988) and Susa Shinryū 須佐晋龍 (d.u.); and even “A Comparative Index to the *Samyuttā-Nikāya* and the *Samyukta-Āgama*” by Akanuma. However, it also carried articles that were more popular in nature, as exemplified by a series of vignettes of Japanese temples by Beatrice Lane Suzuki writing under her Buddhist name Seiren 青蓮 (Blue Lotus). Finally, there were also book reviews and notes on Buddhist events in Japan, all aiming to spread information about Japanese Buddhism to the academic community worldwide.

With the death of Beatrice Lane Suzuki and the approach of World War II, *The Eastern Buddhist* suspended publication with volume 7, numbers 3/4 in 1939. It was briefly revived in 1949 but was finally forced to discontinue in 1958 after publishing only four issues (vol. 8, nos. 1–4) in ten years. However, it was restarted in 1965 as *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series under the editorship of Suzuki, Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990), and Sakamoto Hiroshi 坂本弘 (1913–2005), beginning a new era in the history of the journal. After Suzuki passed away in 1966,¹ the journal continued to be published by a team of editors under Nishitani's leadership and was carried on by Abe Masao 阿部正雄 (1915–2006) after Nishitani passed away in 1990.

¹ The entire issue of vol. 2, no. 1 of the New Series, published in August 1967, was devoted to a memorial for Suzuki.

During these years, *The Eastern Buddhist* carried a number of articles by scholars associated with the Kyoto school—including Nishitani, Abe, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi 久松真一 (1889–1980), and Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照 (1926–2019)—that sought to engage Western philosophy from the perspective of Zen. Special mention must be made of the fact that Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness* (translated by Jan Van Bragt [1928–2007]), probably the single most influential work in introducing Kyoto school thought to the English-speaking world, was first published serially in this journal. The essays of the scholars mentioned above, along with those of American and European scholars and intellectuals inspired by them, constituted a major portion of the articles published until about the year 2000, and they remain an important heritage of *The Eastern Buddhist*. In this context, it may be mentioned that, thanks in large part to the fact that Abe was a leading figure in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue that became popular in the 1980s, *The Eastern Buddhist* served as a major platform where scholars engaged in interfaith dialogue could present their views. However, it should not be forgotten that, as in the prewar years, studies on other facets of Buddhism, especially Pure Land Buddhism, appeared regularly in the journal. Moreover, translations of Chinese and Japanese Buddhist texts, such as chapters from Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 by Abe and Norman Waddell, and selections from the *Ippen shōnin goroku* 一遍上人語録 (*Records of Ippen*) by Dennis Hirota were also featured prominently in the journal.

At this point, let me interject a few words of personal reminiscences. I first became acquainted with *The Eastern Buddhist* in 1975, when I became a student at Otani University. The journal's office was then located on the second floor of a stately wooden building that housed the university cafeteria (the building had originally been built as the university library). The office consisted of two rooms with high ceilings, one filled with the cluttered desks of the editors and another that served (among other things) as a seminar room. The latter, I remember, was packed with books belonging to Nishitani. The secretaries, Dan Yukie 檀幸江 and Wayne Yokoyama, cheerfully opened the doors of the office to a host of American and European students like me that had congregated in Kyoto from their interest in Buddhism. The editorial board then consisted of Nishitani, Sakamoto, and Itō Emyō 伊東慧明 (1932–2013) as editors, and Abe, Bandō Shōjun 坂東性純 (1932–2004), Richard DeMartino (1922–2013), Nagao Gadjin 長尾雅人 (1907–2005), Mihoko Okamura, Satō Taira 佐藤平, Ueda, and Waddell as associate editors. In addition to publishing the journal, a series of memorable seminars on various aspects of Buddhism were offered at this time: one led by Itō on reading D. T. Suzuki's translation of Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*, another on Mahayana Buddhist texts held by Nagao, and a third on Buddhist thought by Nishitani. They were all well attended by dedicated students, both Japanese and Westerners, many of whom went on to become leading scholars of Buddhism themselves.

While not neglecting philosophically oriented studies on Buddhism, from around 2000 when Nagao became its editor and Ichigō Masamichi 一郷正道, professor of Indian Buddhism at Otani, its chief secretary, *The Eastern Buddhist* gradually moved towards publishing more studies on Buddhist thought, situating it in its proper historical context, that is, essays approaching Buddhism not simply as some timeless truth, but paying attention to its character as a historically constructed system of thought and practice. Such studies have always had an important place in the journal; as noted above, articles by strictly philological Buddhologists such as Ui Hakuju are found in the original series. It was around this time that seminal papers by Paul Harrison, Gregory Schopen, and other scholars of early Mahayana Buddhism appeared in the journal's pages. Slightly later, and inspired by Ama Toshimaro 阿滿利磨, who joined the editorial board in 2000 and served as editor in 2007, the journal involved itself in more contemporary issues, the most notable results of which were the timely features on “Japanese Buddhism and Social Ethics” that appeared in volume 33, number 2 (2001), “Buddhism and Economics” in volume 34, number 2 (2002), and “Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Trends towards Religious Unity in Meiji Japan” in volume 37, numbers 1/2 (2005). More recently, under the leadership of Yasutomi Shin'ya 安富信哉 (1944–2017; acting editor, 2008–2011) and Michael Pye (general editor, 2012–2019), *The Eastern Buddhist* has continued to publish on a wide range of Buddhist topics, from studies on Indian, Chinese, and Korean Buddhist texts and thought, to interpretations of Shinran's Pure Land faith, and even to French contributions to Buddhist studies (see the feature on “Francophone Buddhist Studies” in volume 48, number 1 [2017]).

Looking back on the history of *The Eastern Buddhist*, it is possible to say that the goal of the original founders—to dispel the then widespread notion that Mahayana Buddhism is a degenerate form of Buddhism fraught with superstition—has been achieved. No one would now deny that the Mahayana is a legitimate, and indeed a vibrant, form of Buddhism—though sadly, like all other religious traditions, it frequently fails to live up to its lofty ideals. However, this does not mean that the role to be played by *The Eastern Buddhist* has disappeared, since there are still many aspects of Buddhism in need of further investigation. In the Third Series, we will continue the tradition established in earlier issues and publish historically informed studies on Buddhist thought as well as translations of Buddhist texts. Such studies focusing on Buddhist intellectual history have always been central to *The Eastern Buddhist* and will continue to be so in the future.

Moreover, it is our wish to build on and extend the legacy of the work of Nishitani and other scholars by making available studies that creatively engage with problems of the contemporary world from a Buddhist perspective. As is well known, Nishitani considered the main philosophical issue confronting his age to be nihilism, or the

loss of meaning brought on by the increasing technologization of the world which, in turn, was made possible by objectifying all things (including humans) as manipulable resources. Nishitani's solution for overcoming nihilism was to return to a state prior to the bifurcation of the world into subject and object, a standpoint which the Kyoto school philosophers termed "absolute nothingness" or, in more traditional Buddhist terms, the standpoint of absolute emptiness in which emptiness itself has been emptied. Two decades after Nishitani's death, the problem of nihilism has receded from the center stage of philosophical discourse and its place has been taken by various forms of poststructuralist thought. But although poststructuralism has made us more keenly aware of the ultimate groundlessness of human existence, it has unfortunately failed to offer any suggestions concerning the ways in which we can cope with the bottomless abyss that has opened up beneath our feet. Moreover, the problems generated by human self-centeredness and its concomitant unbridled technological manipulation of the world remain as serious and tenacious as ever. Indeed, with the rapid growth of new technologies (such as new digital forms of communication like the Internet, genetic engineering, and artificial intelligence) and increasing globalism, they have only been exacerbated. We are convinced that the Buddhist tradition, with its emphasis on selflessness (and the radical critique of craving that it entails), emptiness, and interdependence, has much to offer in suggesting solutions to these intractable problems, and we hope that *The Eastern Buddhist* may serve as a medium for airing possible approaches to overcoming them. Finally, it may be noted that during the past few years, a number of articles have been submitted by scholars from China, Korea, South and Southeast Asia. We hope that this trend will continue, enabling *The Eastern Buddhist* to become a truly international forum for the fruitful exchange of ideas concerning Buddhism.