

Challenges and Opportunities for Buddhism in the U.S.

美國佛教的挑戰和機會

A Talk by John V. Vu at the Buddha Hall of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas on January 13, 2025
武親道居士2025年1月13日講於萬佛聖城大殿

Today, I want to discuss the challenges and opportunities for propagating Buddhism in America and Western countries.

After the Buddha entered Nirvana, many of his disciples began to spread his teachings to other parts of India and the surrounding countries. When traveling to other countries, many disciples encountered barriers such as unfamiliar languages, cultures, and traditions, so they had to adapt the teaching to the local culture based on the principle: “Accord with conditions, but do not change.” As they traveled to the North, South, East, and West, each area took on specific adaptations so there are distinct forms of Buddhism in those countries:

When Buddhism spread to the North (Tibet, then Mongolia and Russia), it encountered a local religion called “Bon” that focused on the supernatural with many demons and deities. Indian monks who went there were not initially successful

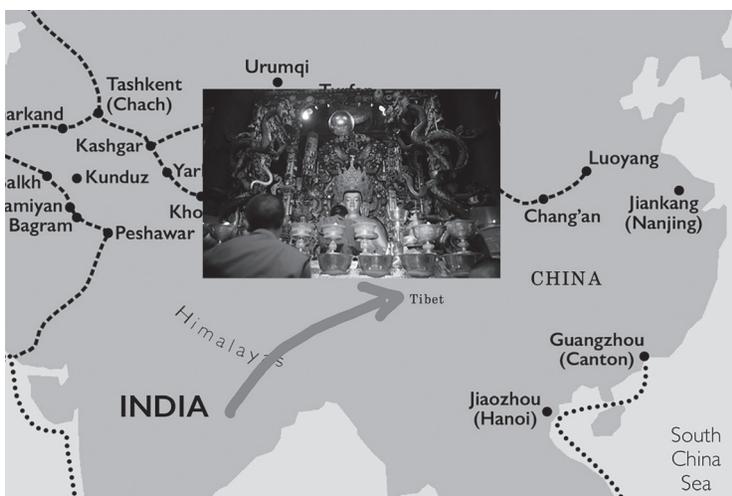
今天，我想談談在美國和西方國家傳播佛教的挑戰和機會。

佛陀入滅後，很多弟子開始把教義傳播到印度其他地區和周邊國家。當前往其他國家時，很多人遇到語言、文化和傳統的障礙，因此他們不得不根據「隨緣不變」的原則，將教義適應當地文化。隨著他們向北、南、東、西各地傳播，每個地區都有特定的適應方式，因此這些國家有不同的佛教形式：

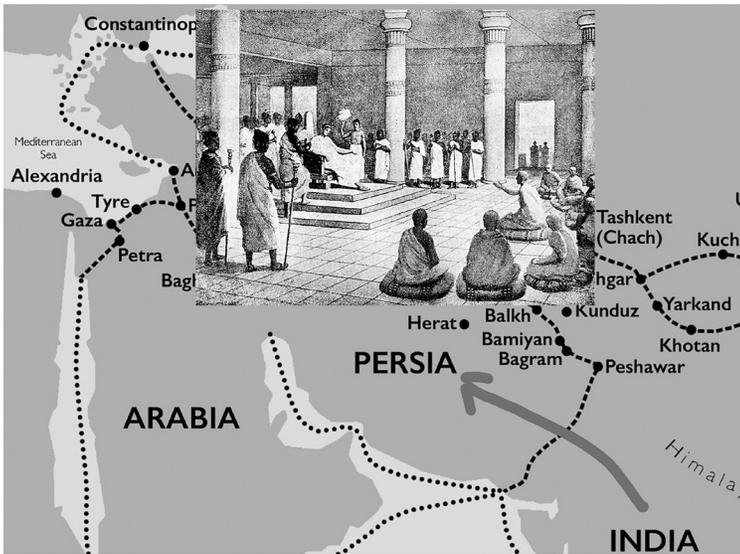
當佛教向北傳播（西藏，然後是蒙古和俄羅斯）時，遇到了一個名為「苯教」的當地宗教，該宗教專注於超自然現象，和很多惡魔和神靈。去那裏的印度僧侶，一開始因為苯教祭司的阻撓，而未能成功。其後，來自毗克拉瑪希拉大學（金剛乘和密教中心）的蓮花生大士、那洛巴尊者、阿底峽尊者等人，成功將教義融入西藏文化，將這些惡魔和神靈轉化為護法神，逐漸演變成藏傳佛教。

當佛教向南傳播（斯里蘭卡，然後是泰國、緬甸、寮國、柬埔寨）時，得到了斯里蘭卡國王的支持，因此佛教在那裏繁榮起來。通過當地僧人的努力，一些經典被翻譯成當地語言，成為巴利文經典。這些地區的佛教稱為上座部佛教。

當佛教向西傳播（大夏、波斯、希臘）時，遇到了希臘哲學和藝術文



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When Buddhism went to the West (Bactria, Persia, and Greece), it met Greek philosophy and arts.

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due to the obstructions of the Bon priests. But later Padmasambhava, Atisha, and Naropa from Vikramasila University, a center for Vajrayana and Tantric Buddhism, successfully adapted the teachings to Tibetan culture and converted these demons and deities into Dharma protectors. That is what evolved into Tibetan Buddhism.

When Buddhism spread to the South (Sri Lanka, then Thailand, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia) it received the support of Sri Lankan kings, so Buddhism flourished there. Through the efforts of the native Sangha, some sutras were translated into the local language as the Pali canon. Buddhism in these areas is called Theravada Buddhism.

When Buddhism went to the West (Bactria, Persia, and Greece), it met Greek philosophy and arts. The local sangha adapted the teaching into what is called Greco-Buddhism, which emphasizes Greek philosophy and logic as evidenced in the Milindapañha, a record of dialogue between the King Menander of Bactria and the Buddhist monk Nāgasena. Under the influence of Greek art, local artists created many Buddha images, some of which remain today. (It is important to note that Bactria is an important Buddhist center which flourished over ten centuries before converting to Islam.)

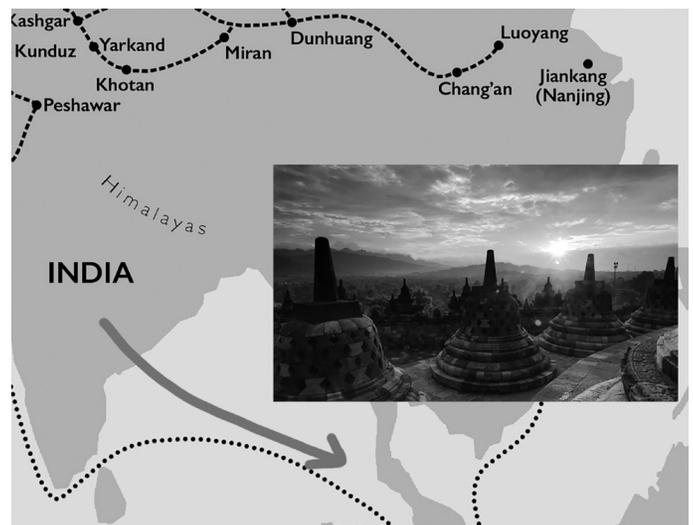
化。當地僧人將教義融入本土文化，成為希臘佛教的形式，強調希臘哲學和邏輯，如《彌蘭陀王問經》所記載，這是希臘人大夏王彌蘭多羅斯（彌蘭陀王）和那先比丘之間對話的記錄。在希臘藝術的影響下，當地藝術家創作許多佛像，其中一些至今仍然存在。（重要的是，大夏曾是重要的佛教中心，在轉向伊斯蘭教之前，繁榮了十多個世紀。）

當佛教向東傳播（中國，然後是日本、韓國、越南）時，遇到了深植於道教和儒家傳統的豐富文化，這為佛教扎根提供了沃土。印度僧人受到中國皇帝的歡迎，皇帝為他們提供了寺廟和支持，使他們能夠教授和翻譯經典。

要注意的重點是，儘管印度僧人能夠在這些國家翻譯和教授經典，但他們的努力就像是播種。熟悉語言和本土僧人繼續翻譯和培育這些播下的種子，使其扎根，長成結出佛法果實的樹木。有些人甚至前往印度學習並請回經典，如中國的玄奘大師和法顯大師。西藏的仁欽贊波使佛教在那裏蓬勃發展，成為西藏主要宗教。

當佛教傳播到美國時，美國佛教又是何等狀況？

佛教在19世紀末到達美國。1893年世界宗



When Buddhism spread to the South (Sri Lanka, then Thailand, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia) it received the support of Sri Lankan kings, so Buddhism flourished there.

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When Buddhism spread to the East (China, then Japan, Korea, and Vietnam), it met a rich culture deeply rooted in the tradition of Daoism and Confucianism, which provided a fertile area for Buddhism to take root. Indian monks were welcomed by Chinese emperors, who provided them with monasteries and support so they could teach and translate sutras.

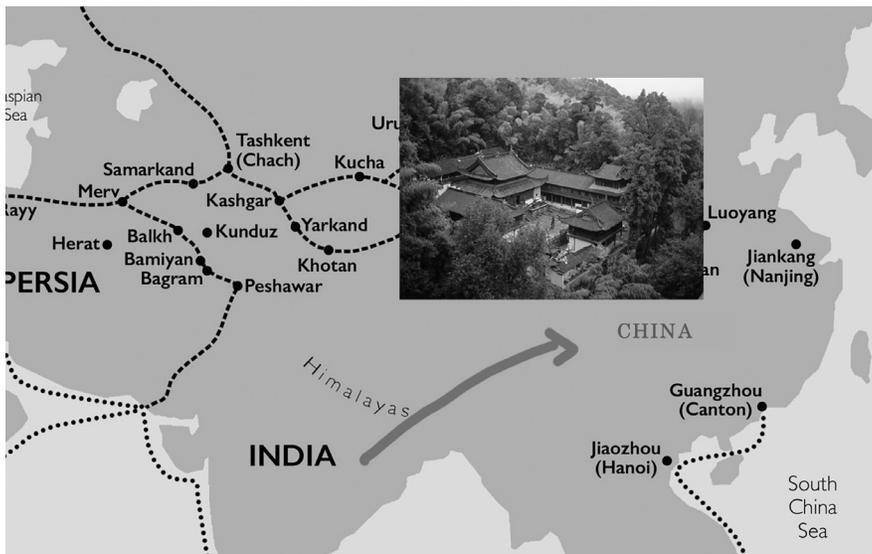
It is important to note that although Indian monks were able to translate and teach in these countries, their effort was like planting seeds. It was the native sangha who knew the languages and culture well enough to continue working on the translations and nurturing these planted seeds to take root, growing them into trees that bear Dharma fruits. Some such as Dharma masters Xuan Zang and Fa Hsien in China even traveled back to India to learn and bring back sutras. Rinchen Zangpo in Tibet enabled Buddhism to blossom into the main religion there.

As Buddhism spread to America, what would American Buddhism be like?

Buddhism reached America in the late 19th century. During the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, Japanese Zen master Shaku Sōen and Anagārika Dharmapāla, a Sri Lankan monk, who had each studied Western science and philosophy, introduced Buddhism to Western audiences as “a spiritual tradition but not a religious one.”

Zen Master Shaku Soen sent his student Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki to the U.S. to continue propagating Buddhism. Suzuki's prolific writings, which have influenced many intellectuals and college students, somehow gave an unintentional perception that Buddhism is mostly about meditation. His writings did not say much about doctrines, rituals, precepts for ordained monks, or ethics. This perception of Buddhism even persists in America to this day.

In 1962, the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua brought Buddhism to America. This was the first time a complete orthodox Buddhism seed was planted in this country, and it is up to us, his disciples, to nurture these seedlings so they can grow into trees that bear the fruits of Dharma.



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教議會期間，日本禪師釋宗演和斯里蘭卡僧人法護尊者，兩人都學習了西方科學和哲學，向西方聽眾介紹佛教是「精神傳統而非宗教」。

釋宗演禪師派遣他的徒弟鈴木大拙，到美國繼續傳播佛教。鈴木的著作很多，影響了許多知識分子和大學生，但某種程度上，無意中讓人認為佛教主要是關於坐禪。鈴木的著作中沒有太多關於教義、儀式、比丘戒律或道德的內容。這種對佛教的認知，至今在美國仍然存在。

1962年，宣化上人帶來了完整正統佛教的種子，首度將正法植入美國。現在，我們這些弟子需要培育這些幼苗，使其長成大樹，結出正法的果實。

宗教進入新地區時，總是面臨語言、文化和傳統的障礙。上人給出具體指示，以克服這些障礙。

When religion enters a new place, it always faces barriers of language, culture, and tradition. The Venerable Master gives specific instructions to overcome these barriers.

The first is to translate sutras into English and then to other languages. We are happy to see that during the past fifty years, the Buddhist Text Translation Society has translated many sutras and Buddhist books — the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Shurangama Sutra*, the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, and many others into English and other languages. These translation works also include commentaries from the Venerable Master Hua that make these translation works unique and highly valuable to readers, in contrast to previous translations by scholars with limited explanation.

As disciples, we need to continue the translation efforts to bring these wonderful books to a wider audience and propagate the Buddha's teaching to Western countries.

The second step is to establish a Sangha with ordained monks and nuns according to the Buddha's instructions and precepts. This is the most important thing for Buddhism to remain and flourish in America and Western countries, as there are many self-declared gurus and non-ordained monks and nuns running amok with their cults and followers.

As disciples, we need to support the training of the Sangha and encourage more Westerners to follow this path. We need a strong Sangha to nurture the seeds that the Venerable Master planted so that someday they will grow into trees that bear dharma fruit in Western countries.

Americans have been fascinated with the appeal of meditation for a long time, but due to the lack of genuine meditation teachers, many Americans turn to learning from self-declared gurus, New Age Zen teachers, and non-ordained monks with dire consequences. Meditation is being promoted superficially as a method for stress reduction or a way to achieve personal happiness. Over time, it has become “commercialized” with hundreds of meditation centers all over the U.S. valued at billions of dollars.

To change this misconception and to provide a proper method of meditation to Americans, DRBA (Dharma Realm Buddhist Association) could open more classes on traditional meditation or Chan, and include a complete history of patriarchs over time as well as the genuine method taught in the *Platform Sutra* or Guanyin's method in the *Shurangama Sutra*. DRBA may want to offer more meditation classes, from the beginning level to the more advanced with guidelines and instructions for each, not only at CTTB but

首先是將經典翻譯成英文，然後再翻譯成其他語言。我們很高興看到在過去的50年裏，佛經翻譯委員會已將許多經典和佛書翻譯成英文和其他語言——《法華經》、《楞嚴經》、《華嚴經》等等。這些翻譯作品還包括宣公上人的淺釋，使這些翻譯書籍對讀者具有獨特且極高的價值，與先前的學者翻譯不同，那些翻譯作品的解釋很有限。

身為弟子，我們需要繼續翻譯努力，將這些美好殊勝的書籍帶給更廣泛的讀者，並將佛陀的教義傳播到西方國家。

其次是根據佛陀的指導和戒律，建立由比丘和比丘尼組成的僧團。這是佛教在美國和西方國家長久繁榮的最重要因素，因為有很多自稱為上師和未受戒的出家人（並非比丘或比丘尼）自立門派，有各自的追隨者。

作為弟子，我們需要支持僧伽的培訓，並鼓勵更多的西方人走上這條道路。我們需要一個強大的僧團來培育上人種下的種子，這樣有一天，它們可以在西方國家長成結出佛法果實的樹木。

長期以來，美國人對坐禪的吸引力一直很感興趣。但由於缺乏真正的打坐老師，許多美國人轉向自稱為上師、新時代禪師和未受戒的僧人學習，後果嚴重。坐禪被淺薄地宣傳為減壓方法，或者獲得個人幸福的方法。隨著時間的推移，更變得「商業化」，全美有數百家禪坐中心，商業價值高達數十億美元。

為了改變這種錯誤認知，並向美國人提供正確的禪坐方法，法界佛教總會（法總）不妨開設更多傳統打坐或禪修課程，全面講述



also at many of our branches to make meditation widely available to the public.

To propagate Buddhism widely in the Western world, where science, technology, and rational philosophy are major parts of the culture, there are opportunities for DRBA to focus on the application of the Buddhadharma to areas such as science, technology, medicine, the environment, and ethics. Each of these involves many issues for which Buddhism can offer solutions.

For example, there is a growing recognition among neuroscientists that the mind, not the brain, is responsible for consciousness and experience. Even muscles and cells are also found to have memory. This finding has created lots of debate among scientists about consciousness and where the mind is located. I think Buddhism could offer some explanations.

Based on these opportunities, I would like to propose the establishment of an Institute for Applied Buddhism to address these issues. The institute's mission would be to propagate genuine Buddhism to the Western world by providing seminars, classes, conferences, publications, and eventually research in the application of the Buddhadharma in areas that have the potential to lead to a better and more harmonious world. The institute can create a platform to bring Dharma Masters and scientists together for dialogue on the advancement of technology based on Buddhist ethics, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Biotechnology, Gene Editing, Climate change, Neuroscience, Consciousness, Psychotherapy, Meditation, and Eastern medicine that may lead to better understanding and advancement in these areas.

If we can expand the teaching of the Venerable Master to these areas that need guidelines and ethics to eliminate greed, anger, and self-interests that have the potential to destroy our world, then Buddhism has a great deal to offer on a global level. Amitabha! ❀

歷代祖師的歷史，以及《六祖壇經》中的真正禪修方法；或《楞嚴經》中，觀音菩薩的耳根圓通法門。法總可能希望在萬佛聖城及其許多分支道場，提供更多禪坐課程，從初級到高級的指導和訓練，讓大眾廣泛接觸打坐。

為了在以科學、技術和理性哲學為主要文化的西方世界廣泛傳播佛教，法總有機會專注於佛法在科學、技術、醫學、環境和倫理等領域的應用，這些領域存在很多問題，而佛教可以提供解決方案。

例如，神經科學家越來越認識到心識，而不是大腦，是管著意識和經驗；甚至發現，肌肉和細胞也能記憶，這在科學家中引發了大量對於意識和心識位置的辯論。我認為佛教可以提供一些解釋。

基於這些機會，我想提議成立「應用佛教研究所」，解決這些問題。該研究所的使命是通過提供研討會、課程、會議、出版物和最終研究，傳播正法到西方世界，將佛法應用在可能導致更美好、更和諧世界的領域。研究所可以創建一個平台，讓法師和科學家以佛教倫理為根據，針對科技進步進行對話，例如人工智能（AI）、生物技術、基因編輯、氣候變化、神經科學、意識、心理治療、打坐和東方醫學等方面，可望為這些領域帶來更好的理解和進步。

如果我們能將上人的教法，擴展到這些需要引導和道德倫理的領域，以消除可能毀滅我們世界的貪婪、憤怒和自私自利，那麼佛教可以為全球作出巨大的貢獻。阿彌陀佛！ ❀