

Research of the transmission of and issues regarding Buddhism in America : an honors college thesis (HONRS 499)

Berning, Rita M.

Advisor: Brackett, Jeffrey M.

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Abstract:

We are now witnessing only the immediate aftermath of the first, large-scale fluorescence of Buddhism in America. The rapid turning of the wheel of the dharma in the last three decades churned up great clouds of New World dust, much of which still remains suspended in the air. And historical precedents in Asia suggest that there is a great deal more yet to come." (Williams and Queen, 1999, p. xxxiv.) – Richard Hughes Seager
In recent decades, Theravada Buddhist traditions have transferred west from Southeast Asia through multiple methods and techniques. Immigrants traveled west in search of work and 'freedom,' Peace Corps volunteers brought back philosophies learned while overseas, and Buddhist monks and missionaries have carried their message out from the East. However, upon arrival in the U.S., Theravada Buddhists have been required to adapt their practices and traditions in vast way in order to better 'fit' into American culture and society. The many forms of Buddhism now in America reflect its inherent ability to adapt to modernity and to reach Westerners on a simpler level than by attempting to use the complicated and deeply-rooted traditions associated with Southeast Asian Theravada. One challenge is to synthesize numerous forms of Buddhism that are present in American into a single, united 'American Buddhism.' There are, however, many factors to consider, including societal condition, current religious traditions, resources for and goals of practitioners, and practitioners' links to the country from which their tradition originated. The coming decades will illustrate Buddhism's adaptive and collaborative capabilities as it works toward a united form of Western, or American Buddhism.

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