

Introduction

Focusing upon the cultural milieu of East Asia, this special issue aims to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the prevailing views on the history and philosophy of Buddhism in East Asian regions, especially concentrating upon its developments in China and Japan. From a variety of perspectives it will illuminate East Asian Buddhism, which is an umbrella term for several schools of (predominantly) Mahayana Buddhism that developed in the area, and mainly followed the Chinese Buddhist Canon. Buddhism first came to East Asia in the first century, when it spread to China during the Han Dynasty period through Indian missionaries. From that era on, the Mahayana school thoroughly played an important role in East Asian histories and cultures. In the 2nd and 3rd century, Buddhism also arrived in North Vietnam. Later on, starting in the 4th century, it gradually spread further to Korea and Japan. Approximately by the 7th century, another school of Mahayana Buddhism, which inherited the historically comprehensive development of original Indian Buddhism, formed the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, expanding its influence from Tibet to Mongolia and then also to many other Central Asian regions.

Each of these cultures and regions changed several Buddhist methods and practices, adapting them to local customs and to local ideational and spiritual traditions. Since Buddhism never formed an overall hierarchical structure of common authorities, each region developed its own orders and institutions with various local spiritual heads. However, in spite of its various forms, theories and practices, Buddhism never and nowhere gave up its basic principles of wisdom and compassion.

In the course of its long history, Buddhism has had a great impact on many East Asian cultures and civilizations. Even today, its strong influence is still

visible throughout the East Asian cultural environment. These historical and contemporary impacts can be seen in almost all segments of East Asian societies. They can be found in various examples of literary masterpieces, in eternal artistic artefacts and timeless architectural monuments, and in great philosophical works. In East Asia, Buddhist traditions, histories, teachings, and artistic representations are instrumental, if not absolutely necessary, for comprehending the fascinating complexity of cultural developments. Hence, it is not merely limited to the role of a common cultural heritage that reflects and preserves important elements of history, but also remains a significant factor in present East Asian societies.

East Asian Buddhism has a long, complex, and diversified history. Over the course of centuries, Buddhist doctrines, beliefs, institutions and practices have had a great impact on all cultures in the region, and have thoroughly interacted with countless other segments of cultural and social life. Thus, Buddhism is doubtless an integral part of the broader history of East Asia.

The interactions between Buddhism and local autochthonous cultures doubtlessly represent crucial paradigms or constitutive elements of larger cultural and civilizational patterns, which together have created the general or universal history of humankind. In this sense, Buddhism forms an indispensable and integral part of the global religious and ideational landscapes. Thus, this ancient, but at the same time topical ideational system also belongs to the major religions of the contemporary world, not only with its traditional outposts in many parts of East, South-East and Central Asia, but also with its presence and a growing influence in numerous other regions of our common, globalized world, including Europe and the USA.

The present volume focuses on Buddhism's developments in its traditional strongholds of East Asia. In this context, it aims to cover both the past and the present, and to expose the rich diversity of Buddhist teachings and practices as they can be found at various places in different times, though with a focus on Chinese and Japanese elaborations. Although Buddhism is an ideational tradition

with a very complex and multifarious history, in which communal representations and creative re-inventions of past situations are most significant, we have still tried to ensure that modern and contemporary developments are also adequately included.

Since Buddhism belongs to the crucial common threads in and constitutes an important bridge in intercultural interactions between various geopolitical, ideological, and linguistic spaces in East Asia, this special issue aims to show that their respective differences do not define the reality of cultural exchanges. This reality that Buddhism is a part of is certainly linked to the richness of various languages, local beliefs, and socio-political contexts. However, it is also linked to our common feature of being human. Although East Asian Buddhism is divided into several traditions, they mostly share a common set of fundamental beliefs.

The main purpose of the present special issue is thus to explore the historical and ideational role of this ancient philosophy and religion in East Asian life, and, reversely, to investigate and analyze its philosophical, political, and linguistic modifications, which formed during Buddhism's long journey through these areas. This issue offers new insights into its subject's theoretical backgrounds, and introduces its methods and practices, typical and paradigmatic for East Asian Buddhist schools of thought.

As mentioned, the term East Asian Buddhism is a common expression denoting the schools of Mahayana Buddhism that have spread in the East Asian area and mainly followed the Chinese Buddhist canon. To a limited extent, however, the Vajrayana school can also be found in East Asian Buddhism, as for instance in the Japanese Shingon sect. However, in general it can be said that the most important currents of East Asian Buddhism include the Buddhism of the Pure Land (Amidism) and the Tiantai (the Lotus School), Huayan (Avamtasaka), Yogachara, and Chan (Zen) Buddhist schools. The differences between them have mainly been defined by particular sutras that were considered as most

authoritative or definitive, but also by different methods of meditation and other practices.

The focus on East Asia clearly exposes the trans-national and cosmopolitan and nature of Buddhism, while also pointing to its particular local manifestations. We hope that this special issue can contribute to a deeper understanding of Buddhist theories and practices in more detail and in more contextualized ways, while we would simultaneously like to illuminate some issues that are relevant for broader intellectual concerns on the global level. These elements are especially important if we consider that East Asian Buddhism can be seen as part of a historical continuum, which latently embraces, among other things, numerous elements deriving from pre-Buddhist East Asian religious cultures. These include religious and philosophical concepts that despite being part of or originating from a wider historical context play an important role in East Asian Buddhism. In this regard, the development of Buddhism in East Asia is on the one hand a reflection of the original Indian Buddhist discourses, and on the other the fruit of local traditions and imaginations.

The present issue covers Buddhism in a broader sense as it developed in Chinese and Japanese regions, and introduces several constituent elements of this religion from both historical and contemporary points of view. If we namely search for a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of the Buddhist traditions in all their complexity, we must investigate both their past and their present from several perspectives. We firmly believe that the relation between historical and contemporary issues is of utmost importance, because past conditions the present and the present cannot be fully understood without reflecting upon the past.

The Buddhist conquer of East Asia has namely manifested itself in many ways, including the teachings and everyday lives of ancient masters, the ideals and rituals of traditional religious communities, the transmission of and elaborations upon the content of relevant sources, especially of the canonical

texts, and the prevailing types of economic and political activities that have influenced its teachings at various locations and through different periods.

In addition to analyzing and interpreting some important theoretical problems that are linked to all these aspects, this special issue also introduces some of the present rituals and other practices that illustrate both prosaic, everyday problems and transcendental laws. It mirrors the congregation rules in Buddhist monasteries and other views of institutionalized religion, as well as different representations and different understandings of bodhisattvas, Buddhas, and related deities. It also deals with amalgamations of Buddhism with certain pre-Buddhist or autochthonous East Asian religions, as for instance Shintoism, and philosophies, such as Confucianism, which also contributes to the common cultural thread of the broader East Asian region. We have accordingly tried to take into account both the past and present, although studying the latter requires that scholars of Buddhism apply various additional data collection sources and different methodological approaches.

One of the main conceptual concerns of the present collection is to overcome the prevailing (though artificial) division between Buddhist thought and action, or theory and practice. This is particularly significant considering the fact that even in many contemporary studies we are often confronted with different or separate treatments of Buddhist practices on the one hand, and its ideational discourses, ideologies, or doctrines on the other. It is surely true that not all Buddhist practices are supported by particular doctrines and that, on the other hand, not every doctrine finds its expression in practice. But even though such methodological divisions between ideas and practices might serve certain analytic purposes, we must become aware of the fact that they are both reinforced by separate treatments and presumed by different categories, even though the latter belong to ideational constructs far from reality. Hence, we are convinced that the uncritical acceptance of an approach that separates doctrines from the concrete realization of their teachings can fragment this coherent, though

internally diversified, tradition in ways that obscure its dialectic unity. Proceeding from this conviction, several articles in the present issue clearly show that this very unification of theory and practice belongs to the crucial paradigms that have combined to create the unique nature of East Asian Buddhism.

The research methods applied in this volume seek to synthesize perspectives, knowledge, skills, and epistemologies, in order to facilitate the introduction of a topic, which, while intrinsically coherent, cannot be adequately understood from a single perspective. These methods belong to distinct disciplines and research fields within humanities, such as intellectual history, philosophy, cognitive sciences, or religion, as well as within social sciences such as cultural history, ethnographic research, anthropology, and psychology. Different perspectives can doubtless contribute to a better understanding of the spiritual, philosophical, ethical, and societal problems underlying their intersections.

In composing the present volume, we were proceeding from our common conviction that Western epistemology represents only one of many different models of human comprehension. While considering the fact that, in dealing with East Asian Buddhism, we are necessarily dealing with cross cultural interactions, the authors of the essays included in this special issue consciously tried to consider the incommensurability of diversely (culturally) conditioned paradigms, or theoretical frameworks deriving from diversely formed discourses of different cultural and linguistic environments they were treating in their essays. In other words, due to the intercultural nature of the research topic, they all were necessarily applying certain methods of intercultural research. This kind of intercultural research necessarily involves discursive translation, which implies translation processes that cannot be limited to a linguistic transfer, but must include the interpretation of specific textual / speech structures, categories, concepts, and values existing in diverse socio-cultural contexts. In the context of this special issue it is thus necessary to revive the classic categories and concepts

of traditional Asian (especially Buddhist, but to a certain degree also Daoist and Neo-Confucian) philosophies. This approach, however, was necessarily grounded in an intercultural relativization of the contents based on methodologies that correspond to the specific paradigms of research in the East Asian philosophical and religious traditions, and include comparative philosophy or cultural studies in general. The priority in this approach is preserving traditional East Asian philosophical characteristics and maintaining their autochthonous and traditional methodological principles.

The present issue combines four interesting essays covering Buddhism as it developed and as it was – and still is – practiced in this area. They offer fresh scholarly views on a broad scope of texts, concepts, practices, and institutions. In this sense, the volume brings together cutting-edge studies written by an international group of interdisciplinary scholars, including historians, anthropologists, and philosophers, as well as experts on philology and religious studies. They include topics spanning from the problems pertaining to the accurate interpretation of texts on the basis of philological investigations and philosophical analyses, the complex relations between past and present developments derived by tracing currents of thought as they have undergone changes over time and across regions, to the cultural role and social function of Buddhism in East Asia. Hence, the articles included in this volume deal with various theoretical approaches and concrete scholarly views, considering and debating some of the most influential historical trajectories as well as investigating the realities of Buddhism in contemporary East Asian societies.

Its common thread, East Asian (or, more concrete, particularly Chinese and Japanese) Buddhism, has mainly been illuminated from the following three perspectives:

1. The relation between past and present theories and practices

2. The historical embeddedness and recent developments of Buddhist concepts and categories, and
3. Interactions and fusions with other autochthonous or pre-Buddhist cultural elements

The volume opens with an article written by Sebastjan Vöröš from the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. Entitled “Mindfulness De- or Recontextualized? Traditional Buddhist and Contemporary Perspectives” it aims to clarify the complex relation between the original or traditional Buddhist mindfulness-based meditation on the one hand, and its current adaptations in the field of contemporary psycho- and social therapies. Drawing from various examples in Tibetan and the Zen Buddhist practices, the author reopens the question of whether these contemporary methods are really misconstrued and misused forms of traditional meditation techniques. He also problematizes the complex and sometimes slightly dubious relation between presently-used techniques and studies from the field of contemporary cognitive studies. In the following essay, “Buddhism and Buddhology from the Viewpoint of Yoga Practice and Practical Theory,” Sakuma Hidenori from Tsukuba University in Japan also opens a similar dilemma. In this context, the author proceeds from the question whether neuroscience research can – in spite of its sometimes unsuitable quantitative methodologies – still contribute to the philosophical and epistemological findings of so-called Buddhology, which he defines as field of scholarship that must be distinguished from Buddhism as a religion.

An important intercultural transformation of certain Buddhist elements and their fusion with native East Asian ideational traditions is also the main subject of the following study, which was written by Jana S. Rošker from the University of Ljubljana. Her article entitled “The Fusion of Modern Confucianism and Buddhism: Mou Zongsan’s Journey from Double to Fundamental Ontology” deals with problems of synthesizing certain or methodological elements of the Buddhist tradition with some of the central theoretical approaches of traditional

Confucianism, which – just as Buddhism – also belongs to the common cultural and philosophical heritages of modern East Asia.

Last, but not least, the collection includes an article pertaining to the field of historical anthropology. This article entitled “The Healing Jizō: The Sōtō Zen Kōganji Temple Adapting to Varying Social Conditions” was written by Tinka Delakorda Kawashima. Drawing from the results of her ethnographic research of the Sōtō Zen Kōganji Temple, which is located in Tokyo, the author investigates the impact of a variety of social and economic conditions, which often co-determine the art of activities and the cultural impacts of Buddhist temples throughout the entire East Asian region.

The special issue as a whole aims to offer readers a panoramic view of the impressive richness and diversity of historic, theoretical, and practical Buddhist discourses within East Asian cultures. It is therefore by no means coincidental that the present volume contains detailed analyses of specific themes and topics, for we hope that it can be useful and interesting to broader circles of academic readers, from Ph.D. students and general audiences interested in the topic to experts in Buddhist, religious, historical, and philosophical studies.

We are also well aware of the fact that due to various internal and external influences Buddhism is still continuously confronted with innumerable challenges and changes. It is an ancient but simultaneously very lively tradition, influencing and being influenced by a diverse amalgam of spiritual, social, cultural, economic, and political problems, such as but not limited to recent technological developments and changes in demographic structures. Hence, it will surely continue developing in the shadow of many underlying idiosyncrasies that will lead to its further modifications, diversifications, and adjustments, including patterns of further intercultural transmissions, declines, and revivals. Notwithstanding all these future developments, it is quite reasonable to assume that this great religious and philosophical legacy, which has – and still does – profoundly influenced social and spiritual life in East Asia, will further develop

and co-create the realities of many different societies. Hence, we hope that the essays collected in the present special issue of the *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* will constitute a tiny, but forceful ray of light, illuminating the complex intercultural dimensions of Buddhism.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jana S. ROŠKER', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jana S. ROŠKER
Professor, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia