

Call for Papers for a Special Issue of

Journal of Global Buddhism

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The intermingling of Asian cultures with those of western origin has imbued many forms of Buddhism with a modern flavour. Emerging from the religious conflicts in the modern period, one of the major pre-occupations has been the basis for political and institutional authority. This has ultimately led to the progressive questioning of the legitimacy of religious power and rationalities, and to the eventual institutionalisation of secular rationality. Secular thinking has also impacted on Buddhist institutions and traditions, where, in some communities, significant manifestations of the dharma and its practice have gradually drawn away from their religious cultural and institutional integuments. This tendency expresses itself in various ways, from practice-oriented 'dharma groups' that look more and more like autonomous western voluntary associations rather than lay circles under monastic tutelage, through abandonment of traditional techniques in meditation and other forms of practice, to the de-emphasis and redefining of traditional rituals, to intellectual interventions that explicitly deploy the 'secular Buddhist' label.

Some of these manifestations seem to be moving towards a new 'post-Buddhist' synthesis of Buddhist practices and western intellectual developments, while others gravitate towards a renewal of the Buddhist tradition itself by investigating its specific historical origins and seeking ways to reissue both doctrine and practice to address our own historical situation. What unites these two broad streams is not hostility to religious culture as such, but rather an insistence on understanding doctrine and practice in terms of its historical situations and contingencies, not in terms of the timeless verities and institutions that underpin religious culture. This preference honours the original meaning of the word 'secular', from saeculum – originally a human lifespan, later extended to a century, as in the French siècle.

The secular turn raises issues for the interpretation of the original canon; the divergence between conceptions of other-worldly transcendence and this-world flourishing as motivation for practice; the status of the mind/body dichotomy and its implications for rebirth doctrine; affinities between the dharma on the one hand and certain strands of ancient and modern western thought; the basis of spiritual and moral authority in dharma communities; the forms of association of these communities; and how we recognise what

remains inside Buddhism as a coherent tradition, as against what has vacated it. This is not an exhaustive list of issues that may be addressed, merely a representative one.

We understand secular Buddhism to constitute an emerging, heterodox tendency, not a ready-formed doctrine or school of Buddhism, or alternative to Buddhism. We therefore seek to explore this tendency and its implications in the special issue of the journal, rather than invite a for-and-against debate about it, one that would lack a definable object and thus coherence. If the special issue achieves its purpose it will have prepared the ground for such a debate in the future. Please note also that the Journal of Global Buddhism does not publish articles which engage in philological text exegesis of classic texts. Given the focus of the special issue, this principle seems particularly appropriate.

Articles should be submitted to both guest editors and david.bubna-litic@uts.edu.au, and winton.higgins@uts.edu.au. Informal enquiries may be sent to these addresses as well. The articles should be between 5000 and 7500 words, and comply with the journal's submission requirements, accessible at www.globalbuddhism.org/sub.html.