

Buddhist Literature in Context

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Publisher, The Sumeru Press

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A long history

Buddhism has never limited its teachings to one book

- Kangyur and Tangyur
- Nalanda and Taxila universities
- Tripitaka Koreana
- Digital Tripitaka projects
- etc.

Buddhism has great book culture.



Changes in publishing technology

- The first book published with moveable type was *The Diamond Sutra* in 686 CE. Found in the Mogao Caves in China and looted by Sir Aurel Stein. Predates Gutenberg's Bible (1454 CE) by 768 years.



Timeline

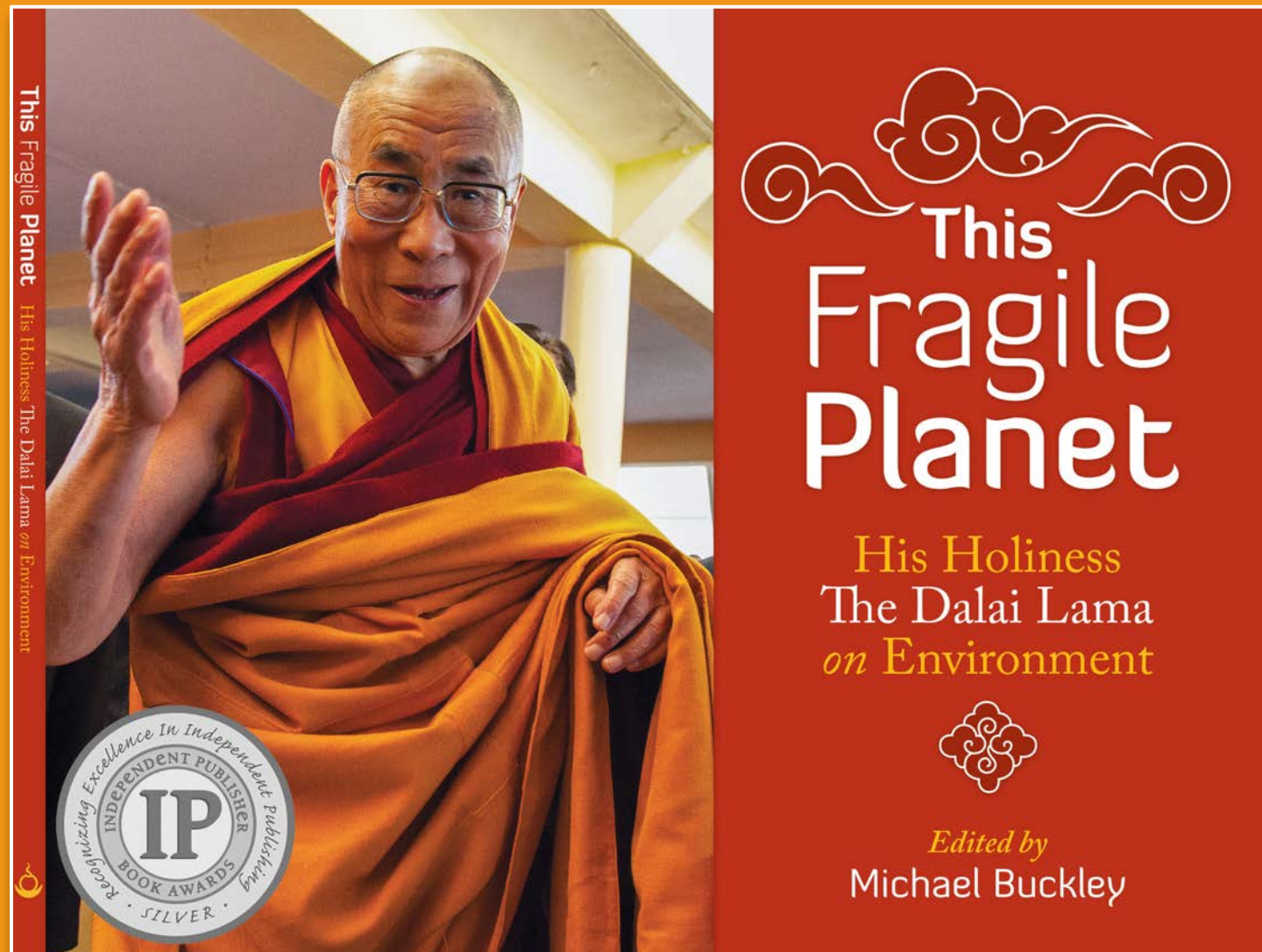
- stone inscriptions, e.g., Asoka's Pillar
- palm leaves
- woodblock + paper
- moveable type
- offset lithography
- digital prepress
- print on demand
- paperless screen texts
- eBooks
- blogs
- podcasts
- etc.

Who gets to publish?

- Wisdom, Shambhala and...?
- “One Lineage Only” publishers: Parallax, FPMT, Triratna, etc.
- Mass market publishers: Penguin Random House, increasing concentration and vertical integration. Buddhism as commodity.
- Academic presses
- Lack of small press culture
- Co-creating the future

How do we evaluate Buddhist literature?

- Doctrinal purity
- Motivational force
- Transferrable lessons
- Green Buddhism
- Socially Engaged Buddhism
- Scholarly rigor
- Celebrity culture (“A-List” teachers)
- Linguistic ghettos, spiritual pride, parochialism, etc.
- Sales
- Awards



What is the goal of Buddhist literature?

- Reducing suffering
- Enlightenment
- Pure Land guidebooks
- Mindfulness, Get Your Zen on, Secular Buddhism, etc.
- Quantity or quality?
- Public **vs** initiate-only teachings + self-secret texts
- Multiple goals for different genres?

The Story of Zen

Richard Bryan McDaniel



Foreword by Genjo Marinello Roshi

Afterword by Dosho Port Roshi



One Taste + 84,000 Dharma Doors

- Have we got enough Buddhist books?
- Isn't Buddhism a practice rather than a belief system?
- If you write a Buddhist book, are you automatically Buddhist?
- Teachings, teacher scandals and cancel culture
- Buddhism as an enterprise we collectively create (Sangha)
- Being a professional Buddhist (many modalities)
- Nonfiction, fiction, scholarly, and devotional book genres
- Text, image and performance-based discourse systems

Highlights in Canadian Buddhist writing 1

Books about **vs** books by...

Herbert V. Guenther (publishing 1949-1996)

- *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*
- *Kindly Bent to Ease Us* vols. I-III, etc.

Janet McLellan

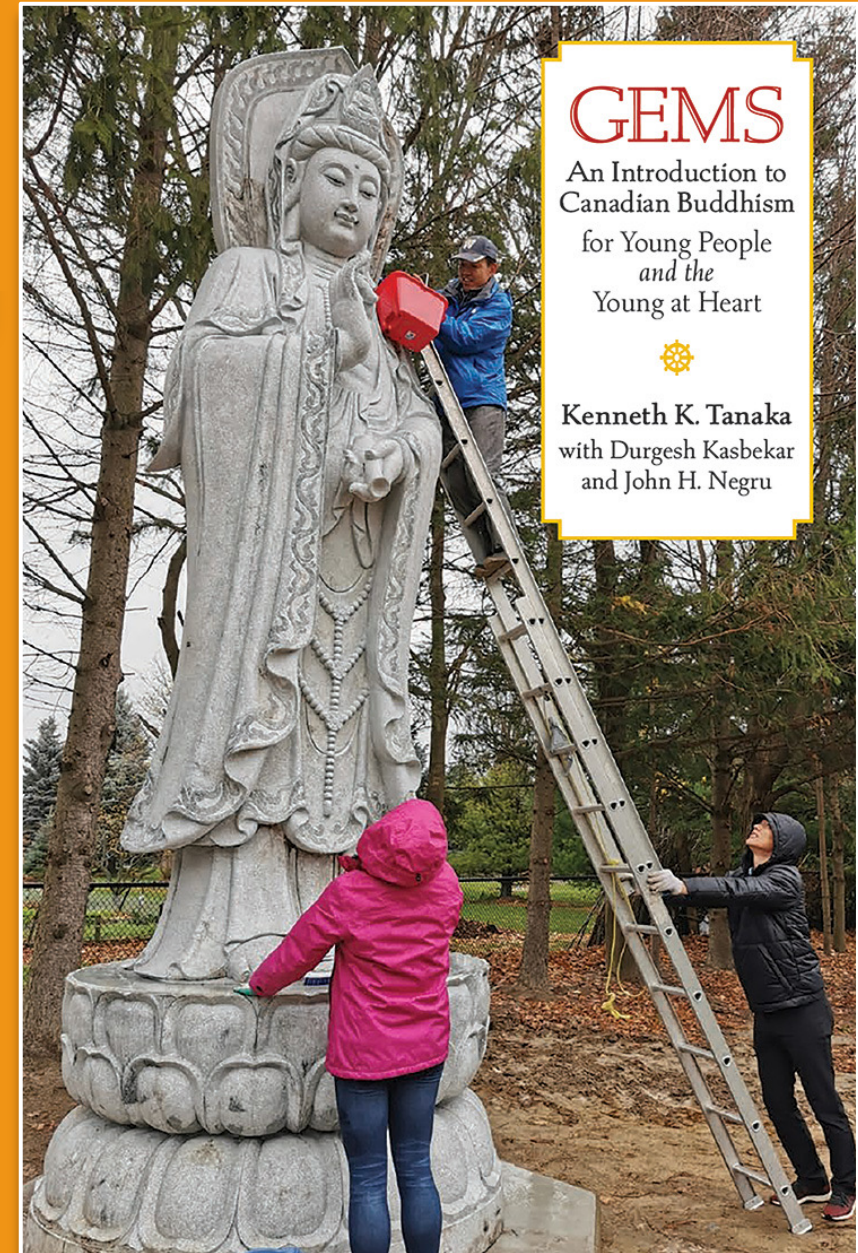
- *Many Petals of the Lotus: Five Asian Buddhist Communities in Toronto* 1999

Victor Hori, John Harding, Alexander Soucy

- *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada* 2010
- *Flowers on the Rock: Global and Local Buddhisms in Canada* 2014

Highlights in Canadian Buddhist writing 2

- Locally produced ritual texts
- Bhante Mihita, cross-over trailblazer
- Maturation of Western Buddhist culture
- Sumeru established 2009
- 33 out of 53 Sumeru books are by Canadian authors
- Self-publishing (incl. free books + workbooks)
- Institute of Tibetan Classics, Geshe Thubten Jinpa, Montreal + The Chyssem Project
- Canada as thought leader, not afterthought



GEMS

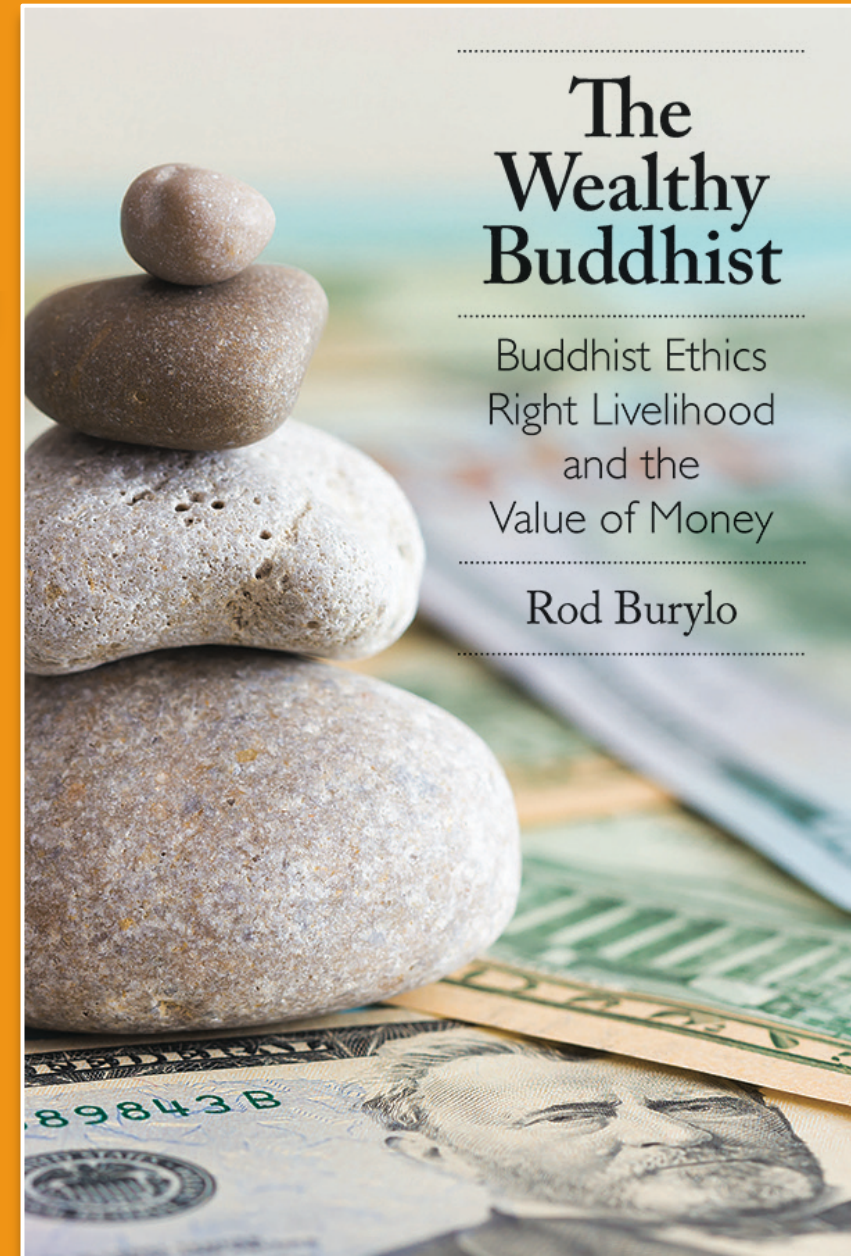
An Introduction to
Canadian Buddhism
for Young People
and the
Young at Heart



Kenneth K. Tanaka
with Durgesh Kasbekar
and John H. Negru

Buddhist publishing as Right Livelihood

- The Dhamma should be free
- Water is a right, but plumbing costs money
- Propagating the Buddhadharma
- Becoming well seasoned in our cultivation
- Service, not personal profit
- The realities of running a modern business
- A crash course in publishing technology and business



Global production, distribution, finance

- Ingram Content Management
 - Print on demand - Lightning Source
 - Ebooks - IngramSpark
 - Distribution - Ingram Publisher Services with 39,000 online booksellers
 - E-commerce platform
- Databases of metadata modifiable in real time
- Print close to destination with subcontractor networks
- Build on ubiquitous deliver-to-home model
- Bookstores in context: national chains, indies, and non-bookstore insets

The changing bookstore

- Decentralization of bricks-and-mortar store as nexus of print culture. Shrinkage of indie booksellers.
- Chapters Indigo:
 - 89 superstores and 122 mall stores
 - What percentage in-store devoted to non-book products?
 - Buddhist books: two shelves in “Eastern Religion” at most
 - Mostly devoted to three teachers and three publishers
 - Plum Rewards loyalty program has 5.8 million members
- Impulse shopping **vs** intentional shopping
- Bookstore as experience destination

Pulp fiction + Bookstore realities

Returns Return the cover, pulp the rest and get your money back from the publisher: an unsustainable business model for small publishers

Digital integration Pallets of mixed products with pallet metadata integrating with the bookstore's point-of-sale (POS) inventory software, e.g., ONIX

Digital Object Identifiers Library tool for digital asset management through metadata

Distributors as gatekeepers Getting books into stores will cost more than you will earn

Bookstores as gatekeepers You must fit our corporate vision / No consignment sales

Lost in the Amazon jungle

- Amazon as portal for third-party vendors with no policing
- Opaque pricing algorithms that fluctuate
- Social media marketing, influencers and consumer culture
- FB Buddhist groups with blindered administrators
- Fear of sales pitches



Marketing Buddhist books

- Free distribution of elaborately produced devotional texts
- Patrons and donors support *dana* economic model
- Vertically integrated marketing
- Ambivalence around advertising
- Magazine gatekeepers
- Insufficient ROI on advertising
- Social media marketing
- Convergence with interfaith and secular NGOs
- Like-minded communities within other discourse systems

How Sumeru operates

- 50/50 sharing of all profits and costs
- Reinvesting profits in the company
- Donating profits to charities and Buddhist organizations
- Alternative distribution system (Buddhist organizations)
- 50% discount to Buddhist organizations
- Authors from around the world who respect Canada as creator, not just consumer of Buddhadharma
- Global distribution
- Focusing on humanistic and green Buddhism

Challenges

- Unique congruence of Buddhist wisdom and publishing skills
- Limited sangha uptake
- Dharma centre bookstores and libraries
- Public libraries and schools
- No external public funding from Arts Councils
 - We don't fund religious publishers
 - You need to sell at least \$75K/yr to qualify for most publishing grants
- Building community
- Succession

The future

- Impermanence of publishers (Snow Lion, now buried in Shambhala's backlist)
- Radical decentralization of points of origin of texts
- Termas, breadcrumbs in the forest, archeological artifacts of Buddhist culture
- The Dharma-Ending Age
- VUCA Anthropocene: Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous
- The world is changing. Is Buddhism?
- Buddhist spiritual care in the breakdown of environmental and social systems

Appreciation

- Vow of service
- Gratitude
- Hope for the future
- In this moment, our upaya skillful means to alleviate suffering
- Ksitigarbha, bodhisattva for the modern age
 - Earth Treasure Bodhisattva
 - Protector of the unborn
 - Refuge for the grief-stricken
 - Willing to work in Hell
 - Dharma holder until Maitreya
 - The Bodhisattva of the Future