

Thursday, Dec. 15, 2016
Noon – 1:30 p.m.
Country Kitchen Catering
1715 Mayor Magrath Drive S.
Lethbridge

How does Buddhism Relate to Christmas in Canada?



Christmas is a big deal. In the religious pluralism of multicultural Canada, it is the dominant winter holiday. There are tensions between secular and religious aspects of Christmas, as well as debates about the merits of the more inclusive greeting, “Happy Holidays,” rather than “Merry Christmas,” but Buddhist festivities are not poised to replace Christmas in seasonal plays, pageants and concerts.

In fact, there is no culture war raging between Buddhism and Christianity. Buddhism is quite tolerant of festivals and cultural practices from other religious traditions. Despite overlapping values of generosity and compassion, there are Buddhist teachings that are certainly wary of the rampant consumerism that many associate with Christmas. Critiques of the commercialization of the holiday are not new, but Buddhist critiques revolve more around the links between suffering, desire, and attachment rather than concerns about the loss of Christian specific teachings.

In this talk, the speaker will share some Buddhists’ views about Christmas in Canada along with instances of overlapping symbols, contrasting cultural understandings, a pop culture portrayal of competition between Buddhism and Christmas, and a few reflections on connections and tensions in the relationship between Buddhism and Christmas.

Speaker: **Dr. John Harding**

John Harding (B.A. in Asian Studies, University of Puget Sound; Ph.D. in Religious Studies, University of Pennsylvania) joined the University of Lethbridge in 2003 where he is an Associate Professor in Religious Studies and the Coordinator of Asian Studies. His primary areas of interest include Japanese Buddhism and the cross-cultural exchange between Asia and the West that has shaped the development of modern Buddhism worldwide. Dr. Harding has co-authored two works on the academic study of religion and is the author or editor of four books on Buddhism with particular focus on Buddhism in the West and on “The Modernization of Buddhism in Global Perspective,” which is the title of his five-year collaborative SSHRC research project.

Moderator: **Tad Mitsui**

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Cost: \$12 (includes lunch) or \$2 (includes coffee/tea)

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