

1) Title:

Legacy of Colonialism in Southeast Asian Buddhism

2) Co-conveners:

Alexander Soucy, Professor, Saint Mary's University

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3) Panel Description:

The European colonization of Asia instigated Buddhist reform movements and the globalization of Buddhism as a world religion. Through these transnational encounters, Buddhism was restructured to conform with the western category of "religion". The Buddhist landscape was redefined to strengthen the distinctions between Buddhism and other religions. Reformers restructured Buddhism by positioning Siddhartha Gautama as the founder, locating Bodhgaya as the centre of the Buddhist world, and setting Wesak as the main event of the Buddhist calendar. Orthodoxies were hardened in a way that marginalized many practices that were central to the lives of most Buddhists in Asia. Internally, Buddhist sectarian lines took on greater relevance. Buddhism and nationalism were also frequently coupled, so that the compulsion to reform Buddhism was tied with modernist projects to uplift countries. Reformers were highly mobile and connected throughout Asia as well as among scholars and converts in the West. While these reform movements were often limited to literate elites in urban centres, the legacy of these movements have continued to exert pressure on the shape of Buddhism across Southeast Asia in the twenty-first century. The hegemonic weight of modernist discourses has continued to shift the way that Buddhism is viewed and practiced today. The papers in this panel will explore how the legacy of colonialism influences the way Buddhism continues to be transformed in Southeast Asia, among Southeast Asian immigrant communities, and by Western followers of Southeast Asian Buddhist teachers. The panel will discuss topics of: Buddhism, secularism and re-enchantment; the rise of Buddhist charity movements; and the redefining of Buddhist practices such as meditation and ritual donations.

4) Format:

Single session (1 x 90 min.): 4 presenters