2600 Years of Sambuddhatva
Global Journey of Awakening

Editors
Oliver Abenayake
Asanga Tilakaratne

Ministry of Buddhadasana and Religious Affairs
Government of Sri Lanka
2554-2555/2011-2012
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ISBN:

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Published by Ministry of Buddhasasana and
Religious Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka
2554-2555/2011-2012
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Buddhism in Spain
Francisco Díez de Velasco

Introduction
Buddhism is currently the fourth minority religion in Spain after Islam, and Evangelical and Orthodox Christianity, in a country where the majority consider themselves Catholic (over 70%) or non religious (around 20%). Of the non Abrahamic religions, it is the one that has had most impact despite the recent introduction of practice groups in Spain (from 1977). Moreover, Spanish Buddhist assets are particularly remarkable and include enormous stupas, monasteries and retreats of significance. The Buddhist population is fast-growing and there are currently around 50,000 active followers at some three hundred centres or practice groups, despite the fact that Buddhism does not usually follow proselytising strategies in this country.

Spain and Buddhism: General Comments and Historical Background
There are four defining moments in the history of relations between Buddhism and the Spanish world:
1. The period of Imperial Spain when relations with Asia were important despite the primary focus on America in the interests of the state. Spanish missionaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries made contact with Buddhists in Japan and China, as well as in other places, and left written evidence of this.
2. The post-imperial period when relations between Spain and Asia declined significantly. Unlike the situation in other European countries where the development of colonial expansion in Asia led to a rise in Buddhist studies at university level, Spain practically ignored Asia in the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century.
3. The democratic period in Spain (from 1978), which coincided with the gradual growth of Buddhist groups in the country and which occurred almost at the same time (or with a slight delay) as events in most neighbouring European countries from where Buddhism principally filtered through to Spain. That time, particularly 1977, marks the true introduction of Buddhism into Spain.
4. The modern period, whose symbolically important landmark came in 2007 with the acknowledgement by the Spanish authorities that Buddhism was de notorio arraigo (“deeply or clearly rooted”), reflecting a greater institutionalization and development of all kinds of Buddhist religious options in Spain. The absence of prior noteworthy relations with Buddhist Asia has meant that the high numbers of immigrants flowing into Spain from the late 1990s until 2009 did not include many ethnic Buddhists. Buddhism in Spain is a religion of converts of either native Spaniards or Europeans who spend short periods or live permanently in Spain, and only a tiny elite of masters resident in Spain but originally from Asia. During the two periods (prior to 1977-78) previously outlined Buddhism was not really visible in Spain. Over and above the possibility that at the time of the Cordovan caliphate or the subsequent Islamic kingdoms of al-Andalus information about this religion spread among erudites, the first effective contacts with Buddhism date from when the Spanish Empire ruled or had considerable influence over vast areas of Asia. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, several Spanish missionaries (Webb 1998: 363-366) when speaking of religions in Japan (such as the Jesuits Francisco Javier and particularly Cosme de Torres) or China (the Augustinian Juan González de Mendoza, the Jesuit Diego de Pantoja and the Dominican Domingo Fernández Navarrete) allude to various characteristics of Buddhism known to them, albeit with differing degrees of misrepresentation. The Japanese case is especially interesting because of the openness and admiration that the Spanish missionaries, who were the first to make inroads in that country, express with particular regard to Zen Buddhist monks (Cooper 1994; Lisón 2005). That said, these references had little impact and were unimportant in the metropolis where any religious divergence was persecuted by the Inquisition to a greater or lesser extent until the early nineteenth century.

Subsequently, and with the exception of brief moments of tolerance, all non-Catholic religious practice was very limited until the early 1970s, and generally speaking Buddhism was little more than an exotic reference in nineteenth and early twentieth century Spanish thought. Two examples can be found in Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo and Juan Valera. Menéndez Pelayo, who was the great scholar of non Catholic options in Spain (which, in his highly religio-centric analysis, he judged
as heterodoxies), when alluding to Buddhism (Diez de Velasco 2011) evidently did so from a second-hand perspective, through stereotypes and reflections from other European authors of the time (with repeated references to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, although by way of criticism he does cite the case of a Spaniard who apparently converted to Buddhism). And the great writer Juan Valera, who lived most of his diplomatic career outside Spain, wrote about what he called “esoteric Buddhism” (Torres-Pou 2007) and did so in the same vein as Alfred P. Sinnet and the Theosophical Society. He clearly looked favourably upon this religion, which was not unusual among the many Spanish theosophists of that time. Francisco García Ayuso, the best Spanish Sanskritist of the time and controversial ultra-Catholic, was against this trend, which we might label “para-Buddhist” (a sympathetic feeling towards Buddhism as an atheistic philosophy or “esoteric” outlook). García Ayuso declared his opposition in a small book about Buddhist Nirvana (Garcia Ayuso 1885) that he presented as a doctoral thesis and was the first work on Buddhism published by a Spanish author.

We should also consider Buddhism as an object of fascination clearly seen in several prominent Spanish authors. For example, in 1897, the famous writer Vicente Blasco Ibáñez published (from prison) a long and inspiring tale entitled El despertar de Budha (“The Awakening of the Buddha”). The text is solely dedicated to the life of Siddhartha from his birth to the beginning of his preaching in Bodhgaya, but the usual miraculous features of the story have been minimized. In 1918, a very young Federico García Lorca wrote a poem entitled Buddha (in which he named him “Tathagata” that masterfully describes the departure from the father’s palace and the process of awakening. Buddhist influences can also be found in the works of various painters and artists, a fine example being Antoni Tàpies.

Furthermore, writings on Buddhism have been published in Spain since the late nineteenth century, increasing considerably at the end of the twentieth century. Today, Spanish is one of the world’s leading languages and is widely published. Many Spanish publishing companies are almost exclusively dedicated to producing books on Buddhism (Dharma, Amara, Tharpa or Chabsöl) and others offer a wide range of works in this field (e.g., Kairós, Urano, Miraguano, Libros de la Liebre de Marzo, Kier, Paidós or Kailas). Numerous translations from English and other modern languages of books and texts about Buddhism are published in Spain (and also many are produced in Spanish by Latin American publishing companies). Far fewer are works or translations of Buddhist texts by Spanish scholars, whether academic in nature or from a Buddhist perspective by Spanish practitioners and Buddhist masters (particularly by Amadeo Solé-Leris, Dokusho Villalba, Jinpa Gyamtso, Isidro Gordí, Juan Manzanera, Aigo Castro or Denko Mesa), or by authors focusing on spirituality in Asia for whom Buddhism is one of their main areas of interest (such as Ramiro Calle and María Teresa Román). Also gaining in importance are works published in Spanish by Asian masters who have lived or currently live in Spain, including Dhiravamsa, Tempa Darguey, Tamding Gyatso or Lobsang Tsurtrim.

It is important to be aware that post-Imperial Spain, now devoid of colonial interests in Buddhist countries in Asia, did not invest in equipping Spanish universities or research centres with any resources of note. This situation has virtually continued until now, since many Spanish academics that currently specialize in Buddhism or have done so in recent years, such as Amadeo Solé-Leris, Raimón Panikkar, Joaquin Pérez Remón, Alfonso Verdú, Jesús López-Gay, Ramón Prats and Abraham Vélez, among others (Webb 1998: 366-371), have done their studies and researches outside Spain. In any case, newly-created official bodies are now beginning to change this panorama. For example, Casa Asia, founded in Barcelona in 2001, centralizes information about university programmes in Asian studies in Spain and supports some of them, though there are no specific studies in Buddhism to date. Young academic researchers in Buddhism, such as Juan Arnaud and Ferrán Mestanza, are no longer required to go abroad in order to carry out their academic work.

To sum up, before the mid-1970s, only profiles of low-level practitioners could be found in Spain, which meant that Buddhism was practically invisible other than for sympathetic individuals, such as the founder of Soprology, Alfonso Caycedo, whose interests lay in Tibetan culture (Caycedo 1971, 387ff.) or in the unstructured practice of foreign residents in Spain (for example, the early followers of Soka Gakkai-Nichiren Shosu) and some Spaniards, many of whom had lived in Asia at some stage. In addition to several individual sympathizers, extremely difficult to detect for research purposes, and a small Catholic elite who were interested in Christianized Zen (including Carlos Castro Cubells, catholic priest and professor of History of Religions at the Pontifical University of Salamanca), the largest group comprised former hippies who had settled in Ibiza and the tourist areas along the Mediterranean coast and
included Buddhist leanings and practices as part of the many other spiritual possibilities they dabbled with. It is worthwhile remembering that most long-standing practising members currently attending Spanish Buddhist centres initiated their journey in search of the inner self after being involved in the “psychedelic experiences” and counterculture utopias of the hippy movement (and the alternative forms of spirituality involved).

Buddhism in Democracy: The Plurality of Buddhisms and their Introduction into Spain

The first stable Buddhist groups appeared in late 1977, around the advent of democracy in Spain with a non-confessional Constitution (in 1978) and a law on religious freedom (in 1980) that permitted the free expression of religious practices and sensibilities including those as culturally diverse from the norm as was Buddhism in Spain at that time. 1977 saw the arrival of the first oriental masters and the creation of genuine groups and centres of Buddhist practice. Early that year, or perhaps at the end of 1976, the Zen dojo in Seville was founded by followers of Taisen Deshimaru (the oldest monk of this lineage is Reizan Shoten-Antonio Orellana, the founder). Though Deshimaru only visited Spain (Barcelona) once in 1981, to a greater or lesser extent many different groups of Zen practising members and centres are associated with him. 1977 saw the establishment of the Karma Kagyu Centre in Barcelona (today Samye Dzong) after the visit of Akgong Rinpoche (the first of many he has made to this country). It was the beginning of the introduction of Kagyupa Tibetan Buddhism, whose notable presence in Spain was aided by the visits and efforts of Kalu Rinpoche (from 1983 until his death), now continued by his disciples. Thubten Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche, lamas of the Gelugpa School also made their first visit to Ibiza in 1977. They promoted the network of Tibetan centres which would later be named Nagajuna and which commenced their activities in 1978, dependent upon the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT). It is important to point out that the first prominent European *tulku* is a Spaniard, Osel Tenzin Rinpoche (Osel Hita Torres), precisely the reincarnation of Lama Thubten Yeshe who died in the USA in 1984. Osel was discovered in a family of Buddhists who managed the retreat centre Osel Ling in Bubión, Granada (Torres 1994; MacKenzie 1996; 1995: 160ff.) Acknowledged as *tulku* in 1986, he was educated at Tibetan centres in India and the West but when he came of age, he chose to follow studies less directly linked to the FPMT and the monastic training.

Two other outstanding moments in the maturing of Buddhism in Spain are the constitution of the Federación de Comunidades Budistas de España (FCBE), the Spanish Buddhist Federation, which has gradually grouped together an important number of the oldest and most widespread Buddhist groups, and the acknowledgment by the State in 2007 of the *notorio arraigo* (“deeply or clearly rooted nature” of Buddhism, which was successfully processed by the FCBE.

Generally speaking, from the outset until today, Zen and Tibetan Buddhism have had the highest number of centres, followers and activities in Spain; though other types of Buddhism have gradually emerged. To date there are around three hundred places of practice, including some twenty monasteries or retreats.

Zen Buddhism has three important platforms in Spain and numerous other independent groups. As for numbers of followers, each group, centre and dojo usually has between fifteen and forty habitual followers (as well as sporadic ones), though many more (several hundred) may gather at temples and specific habitual activities and practices of intensification such as retreats.

One extremely united and institutionalized collective, also a founder member of the FCBE from where the second chairman of the federation, Miguel Ángel Rodríguez Tarno (2004-2010), emerged is the Comunidad Budista Soto Zen (Soto Zen Buddhist Community) led by Dokucho Villalba (Francisco Fernández Villalba), a disciple of Deshimaru in France and of Shuyu Narita in Japan. This community has around ten practice centres, a temple (named “Luz Serena”) in the province of Valencia (Spain), an audiovisual company (Alalba) and prepares training courses for priests and a regulated Buddhist study programme, coordinated by Denko (Francisco) Mesa, who has also participated in an interesting medical study on the influence of Zen meditation on the heart rate (Peresutti 2010).

Another platform is that provided by AZI (Association Zen Internationale), founded by Deshimaru, which encompasses some twenty-five Soto Zen groups throughout Spain, all independent of each other. The Seikyuki-La Morejona Temple, near Seville, led by Raphael Doko Triet, is particularly notable, while other long-standing, highly active centres can also be found in Barcelona, Seville and the Basque Country. They have tended to create their own associations in the autonomous communities where they are well-established such as Catalonia Asociació Zen de Catalunya (Zen Association of Catalonia) and Andalusia Asociación Zen de Andalucía (Zen Association of Andalusia).

Another platform that encompasses seventeen active groups in Spain is the sangha of the Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hahn. It has no retreat (followers go
people. In addition to encouraging actions to support Tibet, defend and promote Tibetan culture, sponsorship and other types of assistance among Tibetans, the centre also has two gompas (“rooms for worship”), one of which is particularly large.

Main Gompa of “Casa del Tibet”, Barcelona

It has also been active in bringing the Dalai Lama to Spain on some six occasions since it was founded.

The Gelugpa School has created two large platforms in Spain, as well as several other independent centres. The oldest is the aforementioned Nagarjuna network (the official name is Comunidad para la Preservación de la Tradición Mahayana (Community for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition) that depends on the FPTM and has a publishing company (Ediciones Dharma), two retreat centres, six urban practice centres (in Madrid, Granada and the remainder along the Mediterranean coast from Barcelona to Murcia) and, since 1977, has encouraged many Buddhist masters to come to Spain either to teach or reside at the group’s various venues. The best known retreat centre is the previously mentioned Osel Ling, located in the province of Granada, founded by Lama Yeshe and named and opened by the Dalai Lama himself on his first visit to Spain in 1982. The centre is a complex of constructions that respect local building techniques while including Tibetan features such as the stupa, the gompa, retreat caves and even a big bronze Tara statue, presiding over the whole. The other and the most recent is the Tushita Centre, located in Catalonia, in the province of Gerona. Dharma publishing house, with headquarters in Novelda (Alicante) and run by Xavier Alongina, is the most active and the oldest of the Spanish Buddhist publishing companies. Since 1992, it has produced over a hundred books, as well as Cuadernos de Budismo, now the only widely circulated journal in Spain since the
disappearance of Dharma (published from 2005 to 2010). The Nagarjuna network is one of the founder communities of the FCBE whose first chairman (1990-2004), Antonio Mínguez, belonged to this group. It became part of the worldwide network founded by Lama Yeshe and managed by Lama Zopa (and, until a few years ago, by Lama Yeshe’s tulkus, Osel Tenzin Rinpoche) and develops projects in aid of Tibetan refugees, and an educational programme (Educación Universal) coordinated by Basili Llorca and Mariana Orozco.

The other Gelugpa platform comprises the Gaden Chöling network, led until his death in 2002 by Guese Tamding Gyatso, a prominent Tibetan master who lived in Spain from 1987 to 2001 when he was named abbot of the Gaden Shartse Monastery in India and whose work is being published in Spanish by another Buddhist publisher, Amara, headed by Isidro Gordi and located in Ciutadella, the Balearics. Since 2002, Guese Tenzing Tamding has presided over this group. In late 2009, the group’s network of centres was integrated into a new federation named Federación Budista Mahayana Thubten Thinley (Thubten Thinley Mahayana Buddhist Federation). It includes eleven practice centres and a retreat centre (Cho Sup Tsang) in Orense (Galicia), and has created the Cho Sup Tsang Foundation to support the group’s activities and provide aid to Tibetan refugees.

The Gelugpa School also encompasses other independent centres, two of which belong to the FCBE. The Tara Centre in Barcelona is led by Gueshe Lobsang Tsultrim. One of the first Buddhist masters to live in Spain, since his initial visit in 1981, he has carried out his work in the Nagarjuna network and then independently at this centre since 2004. Also in Madrid is the Thubten Dargye Ling Centre, headed by Gueshe Tsering Palden, who has lived in Spain since 2000, where he first participated in the Nagarjuna network and then founded this centre in 2003. The premises also house the headquarters of an NGO, Karuna-Dana, in aid of Tibet.

As we have seen, the Kagyupa School took root early on in Spain. Since 1992, three main platforms have disagreed about who they acknowledge as the head of the lineage. Two of the oldest groups in Spain belong to the worldwide network that recognizes Orgyen Trinley Dorje as the seventeenth Karmapa: the platform Samye Dzong, and all whose main centre in Spain is the Dag Sang Kagyu Monastery. The followers of the international network DiamondWay (DW), present in Spain since 1987, recognize Thinley Thaye Dorje as the seventeenth Karmapa.

The DW has been extremely active in their visualization efforts, which include erecting the largest stupa outside Asia in Benalmadena, Malaga The thirty-three metre tall structure stands in a tourist area par excellence, with breathtaking views of the Mediterranean coast and even the African continent. In 2003, the year of its inauguration, 500,000 visitors flocked to the stupa, and numbers have subsequently exceeded 50,000 per year. This is an excellent example of current Buddhist religious tourism in Spain and of its future prospects (Perea and Diez de Velasco, 2011). The DW has also built an enormous worship hall to accommodate more than 2,000 people at their retreat centre, Karma Guen, in the province of Malaga (near Vélez-Málaga), where there is another smaller stupa (built in 1994), surrounded by retreat caves. For years, Karma Guen was the largest DW centre in Europe and was home to several projects including a Buddhist Studies Programme, hosted by the ITAS (Institute for Tibetan and Asian Studies) located at the centre. Floating exhibitions are also held and plans are in place for a future museum. The centre is equipped with a sizable library and every year around 4,000 people mostly from central Europe (Germany and Poland in particular) come to receive the teachings of the Karmapa Thinley Thaye Dorje (whose father lives at Karma Guen) or DW world leader (Ole Nydahl). In Spain, the DW network also has fifteen other practice centres and is certainly a large collective (over 500 active members and some 3,500 more sympathisers) and highly visible (Perea and Diez de Velasco, 2010).

The Samye Dzong platform has its main centre in Barcelona. Founded in 1977 and is the oldest representative of Tibetan Buddhism in Spain. At present the platform coordinates another five centres including the Samye Dechi Ling, in Catalonia, a long-term retreat centre. In 2007, the traditional three-year retreat was concluded by the first group to do so in Spain. Samye Dzong, the founding institution of FCBE, is led by two Spanish lamas, a woman (Tsondu-Lourdes Clapés) and a
man (Jinpa Gyamtso-Ángel Vidal Palet). In 2010 several members of the group participated (Jinpa Gyamtso also wrote the script) in Luis Miñarro’s documentary, Blow Horn, filmed in India. Samye Dzong is also linked with the international NGO run by Akong Rinpoche, the Rokpa Foundation, which has eight centres in Spain and works on projects in aid of Tibet.

The third platform of the Kagyupa School is the network based at the Dag Shang Kagyu Monastery located in Panillo, in Huesca, in the Spanish Pyrenees. It was founded by Kalu Rinpoche in 1984 and has been named general headquarters for Europe of the Shangpa Kagyu lineage for the two-year period, 2010-2012. This impressive complex of Tibetan-style buildings and constructions (including a stupa, the first to be erected in Spain in 1912) houses a complete monastic school directed by Drubgyu Tempa, a naturalized Spaniard of Bhutanese origin with several resident lamas including a Spaniard, Djinpa (Borja de Arquer), author of several books on Tibetan Buddhism. It is also a centre that has welcomed a considerable number of Tibetan masters from different lineages and schools who have gone there to teach. The Dag Shang Kagyu network includes ten centres in Spain and a publishing company (Ediciones Chabso); it was a founding institution of the FCBE and one of its members, Florencio Serrano, is the current chairman (since 2010) of the federation. Círculo Niguma is also linked to Dag Shang Kagyu but in an independent network, led by Spanish Lama Tashi Lhamo (Isabel María Pérez de Hita), with groups in Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia, Salamanca, Seville and Tenerife. It also imparts learning in many other places and belongs to the FCBE.

Various other groups and centres of the Kagyupa School can also be found in Spain. For example, the Treloknath Ling Centre in the province of Gerona belongs to the Drikung Kagyu lineage, and the Drukpa lineage manages a centre in San Sebastian and a foundation in the Canary Islands mainly dedicated to assisting Tibetan refugees. In Navarre, there are two centres, the Karma Samten Ling, in Pamplona, and the Karmapa Mikyö Dorje, in Gulina (where two stupas have been erected, one of which is funerary), while Catalonia has the Karma Tsepil Centre in Vic. All three centres are attended by followers of Trinley Thaye Dorje.

The Sakyapa School of Tibetan Buddhism has had less impact in Spain than those mentioned above, though it does have important centres. The head of the school, Sakya Trizin himself, inaugurated in 2006 what was then the largest European Buddhist centre, Sakya Drögon Ling, in Denia, on the Mediterranean coast of Alicante, in one of the most popular tourist resorts in Spain. It has a spacious gompa in a building that is an impressive architectural piece. It also combines modern construction techniques and respect for Tibetan symbology and design. For its part, Barcelona has the Sakya Gephel Ling Centre, officially opened in 2002 by Sakya Trizin, while Castellón is home to the Sakya Trinley Ling Centre.

Associated by name with the Sakya School is one of the networks of Buddhist centres that has had considerable impact in the Spanish media and whose headquarters are housed at the Sakya Tashi Ling (STL) Monastery, founded in 1996 and located in El Garraf Natural Park in the province of Barcelona. The STL network, which also belongs to the FCBE, includes several urban practice centres and another monastery in Castellón (in addition to various local practice groups). Outside Spain, it has a monastery in Cuzco, Peru, and centres in La Paz, Bolivia, and Lima, Peru. Also connected to the centre are the Sakya SOS Programme and the Prevain Foundation, which provide assistance to Tibetan refugees in particular, as well as managing an orphanage in Kathmandu, Nepal, and programmes in Peru. The STL network is led by Spanish Lama Jamyang Tashi Dorje (Francesc Padró López), some of whose initiatives have been highly successful in the media, including Buddhist music adapted to western arrangements (Monjes budistas, 2005, and Live Mantra, 2008) or a motorbike “tantric” helmet reputed to be protective (it included mantras inside).

Even more of a minority in Spain is the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, though many of the teachings transmitted can be found in several of the aforementioned groups or those that will be seen below, such as Rigpa and Shambhala. But the Nyingma Tersar Centre in Valencia (and another three associated groups in Catalonia), for instance, is purely Nyingma and is a member of the FCBE and also the Songtsen Centre of Barcelona.
Within Tibetan Buddhism, but not fully compliant with the four schools outlined above, are a considerable number of proposals that combine elements of several schools or lineages (an increasingly common practice), as occurs at the Padma Ling Centre in Barcelona (a not unusual blend of Kagyupa and Nyingmaps), or may propose options that seek adaptation to non-Asian and current contexts of global Buddhism. Rigpa, the worldwide network led by Sogyal Rinpoche, who pays frequent visits to Spain, has gradually opened five active main centres in the country since 2000 (Barcelona, Valencia, Madrid, Tenerife and Vigo), in addition to four others groups (Palma, Alicante, Tarragona and Zaragoza), and continues to grow at a significant pace. The Shambala platform has a solid Tibetan Buddhist base but with a particular focus on meditation that reaches beyond only Buddhist proposals. This platform is part of the international network founded by Chögyam Trungpa and has eight centres in Spain. The Dzogchen Community can be said to follow along similar lines and is led by university professor and Tibetan master, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, who pays an annual visit to Spain. Its principal centre, Kunsulbing, was opened in Barcelona in 2007 and offers activities in ten other Spanish cities (particularly in Madrid). It is not essential to have a Buddhist or even a religious identity to become part of this group, a direction that sets a challenge for the future of Buddhism and that has also been detected when talking about Zen—the possibility of practising Zen or Dzogchen devoid of any Buddhist component.

Another Tibetan platform of considerable impact in Spain is the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) whose world leader is Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. The network headquarters in Spain are at Hotel Kadampa, located in the province of Malaga in an area mainly given over to tourism. The design is striking as the meditation hall is situated just five metres from the swimming pool (FIGURE 4), and also surrounded by bungalows and other services customarily found at a country hotel. The area opposite the reception is occupied by the Tharpa publishing company, which publishes the group leader’s works in Spanish (around twenty books and an abundance of leaflets and audio books). This combination of hotel and meditation centre illustrates the adaptability of the group to western conventions, including leisure management, and provides another key to the rise of Buddhist religious tourism in Spain, a country whose principal industry is tourism. The NKT network has another fifteen main centres and another twenty-five small meditation groups.

As well as Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, Spain also has several other representations (orientations, schools and lineages) that we shall next examine as a whole.

Theravada Buddhism, to which belongs the aforementioned notable Spanish scholar Amadeo Solé Leris (Asoka Dhammaviriya) has at present three leading platforms in Spain. The Dhamma Neri Retreat Centre in the province of Barcelona follows the vipassana meditation model of S.N. Goenka, with practice groups at twenty-five places around the country. In 2007, the Asociación Española de Meditación Vipassana (Spanish Association of Vipassana Meditation) was officially set up by followers of the Thai Master Bhuddhadasa who have a retreat centre near Madrid and practice groups active since 1990. The Asociación Española de Budismo Theravada (Spanish Association of Theravada Buddhism) was founded in 2008 and has practice groups in Madrid, Valencia, Zaragoza and Castellón and the Sri Lankan monk Bhante Pannasekara Thero has visited Spain as guest master of the group. Founded in 2010, the Dhamma Sati Retreat Centre, near Madrid, has been linked to this association.

Other vipassana meditation practice groups in the Basque Country, Zaragoza, Catalonia and the Canary Islands are associated with Dhiravamsa, a Thai master from the Theravada tradition who has taken Spanish nationality and has settled in the Canary Islands. He is also a prominent writer on Buddhist subjects. Dhiravamsa has been involved in the creation of the Arya Marga Sangha group in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, one of the most active in the Canaries.

Considerably influenced by the Theravada and Buddhist models that are related to the Pali Canon is another founding group of the FCBE, the Spanish branch of Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, known since
2010 as Comunidad Budista Triratna (Triratna Buddhist Community). The platform has three urban centres in Valencia, Barcelona and Villajoyosa (Alicante), three retreat centres, Guhyaloka in Sella (Alicante) for men, Akashavarna in the province of Teruel for women and a mixed gender centre dedicated to the ecological values of Buddhism, Ecodharma, in Lerida. It attracts many practising members from outside Spain, particularly from the United Kingdom. In the past, the community ran a publishing company Fundación Tres Joyas (Three Jewels Foundation) that currently exists as an online Buddhist bookshop selling Buddhist publications in addition to numerous works that can be downloaded from the Internet, especially those by the group founder (Sangharakshita).

A group with numerous followers in Spain and a long history (since the early 1970s) is Soka Gakkai. This lay group follows a Buddhist model that does not include retreats and therefore has only urban practice centres. At present there are four large groups, bringing together several hundred followers in each (compared to an average of thirty-forty at most Buddhist centres in Spain) the headquarters located in Madrid, one group in Barcelona and two in the Canaries (in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife). Within the framework of the FCBE, this collective is particularly active and has undertaken several initiatives, including an exhibition about the United Nations Earth Charter, aimed at opening up to society. The Nichiren Shoshu group has long been present in Spain (a temple in Madrid and a centre in Tenerife) and was associated with the former group until it broke away in 1994; they follow a more monastic way.

From what we have seen above, groups that become part of a Buddhist platform of a global nature whose profile is essentially international are not unusual in Spain. For example, the Jodo Shinshu group in Seville has close ties with Mexico where this Buddhist model has a notable implantation. Groups like the Buddha’s Light International Association or the International Buddhist Progress Society (Spain), both based in Madrid, function to a certain extent like branches in Spain occasionally preparing the way for the implantation of models of Buddhism with strong components of ethnicity. Although the majority of Buddhists in Spain (except for some group leaders) are non Asian, since immigration to Spain from Buddhist countries has been minimal (with the exception of Chinese communities that do not necessarily practise Buddhism), Buddhist groups are beginning to emerge whose original members are mainly from Asia, especially China, such as the Zhen Fo Zong Ming Zhao Buddhist Community or the Amitabha Foundation, both located in Madrid. This is a growing trend in Spain, a country that is becoming increasingly globalized, pluri-cultural and multi-religious.

**Buddhism in Spain: Challenges and the Future**

Buddhism in Spain is facing a series of challenges that will signify the power of its social impact and its future development.

One such challenge is institutionalization. The tendency to fragment groups according to schools, lineages, masters and sensibilities, a distinguishing feature in the history of Buddhism, is enhanced in a country like Spain that also has a cultural tendency to separate into various identities, memberships and belonging. The actions of the FCBE have striven to overcome peculiarities and to promote a common platform of interests. In recent years this commitment to inclusiveness seems to be expanding as the federation opens up to collaboration agreements with diverse Buddhist groups from various sensibilities. This type of modus operandi of flexible membership and religious belonging has distinguished the Coordinadora Catalana d’Entitats Budistes (the coordinating body in Catalonia of all Buddhist groups) since it was founded in 2007. It is based on a model of inclusiveness that has many possibilities for future application in other autonomous communities of Spain to facilitate relationships, meetings and synergies between different groups. A positive outcome of work coordinated by the FCBE was the aforementioned acknowledgment by the State in 2007 of Buddhism as a clearly or deeply rooted religion in Spain (Fernández Coronado 2009), which may lead to greater advantages in the future, such as the signing of a cooperation agreement similar to that already in place since 1992 for Muslims, Jews and Evangelical Christians (or a comparable procedure). Sustaining a single, free-flowing and sufficiently supported discourse may succeed in the making the State adopt a more open attitude towards the particular needs of Spanish Buddhist groups (characterized by their diversity). An example by way of explanation is the question of the treatment given to the deceased and the likelihood of the authorities accepting a waiting period of three days before the body is handled (a matter of considerable import to many Buddhist groups). Institutions with Buddhist leanings whose aims are to promote these objectives are beginning to emerge (e.g., the Fundación Vivir un Buen Morir (Living a Good Death) located in Zaragoza) and though the efforts of the FCBE until now have not achieved a modification or relaxation of Spanish legislation in this regard, a future challenge is
to do just that. If we extend this to numerous other issues, it is evident that, as the non-Abrahamic religion of most impact in Spain, Buddhism seems called to shoulder the burden of developing awareness, both among society and the authorities, of the nature of Spanish cultural ways, strongly confined within an interpretative context defined by a specific religious option, that must now adapt to the current, highly diverse global framework in which the significance of Asian sensibilities cannot be scorned.

Another challenge facing Buddhism in Spain is the irregularity of its geographical distribution. There are many Buddhist groups along the Mediterranean seaboard from Catalonia to Andalusia, in Madrid and in both the Balearic and Canary Islands. However, the presence of Buddhism in many inland and northern areas is limited to say the least. This is a weakness in the introduction of the religion to add to the snowball effect arising from the previously outlined growing importance of Buddhist religious tourism in certain parts of Spain, which usually seeks out attractive locations with a mild climate (primarily the coastal areas). Yet those who flock to these sites are not mainly Spanish Buddhists but people who generally come from northern Europe. In the long term this issue may become detrimental to the way Buddhism is introduced among the Spanish, since, rather than creating regular practice groups, as it might result in a kind of seasonal Buddhism in which Spaniards act as mere cogs in the wheels of a service industry (in this case for religion) for the enjoyment of others, and it may lead to Buddhism being associated mainly with foreigners and tourists.

Another challenge facing Spanish Buddhism has to do with leadership and is a common issue outside Asia. The legitimacy of masters, lamas, monks and other Buddhist authorities who are Spanish (or generally non Asian) is occasionally lower and sometimes questioned. The policy of acknowledgement continues to give priority to masters from Asia, which in the final analysis tends to uphold the stereotype of Buddhism being regarded as a foreign religion in Spain. The fact that tulku Osel, in whose person both worlds could skilfully coexist, has preferred to renounce to any management role in the FMPT does little to help this situation.

An important step when fomenting the social recognition and visibility of Buddhism is bound up with follower quantification and visualization. The FCBE’s internal data estimates that there are around 65,000 practising Buddhists in Spain and more strict statistical approaches (in the quantification of levels of practice and membership) propose around 25-30,000. We have already emphasized the fact that there are many groups that tend to constitute a diffuse kind of Buddhism with vague or multiple religious belonging. Moreover, there are a considerable number of sympathizers though their commitment to practice is not very constant (something which is also not unusual in Spanish Catholicism). To sum up, it might perhaps be necessary to multiply by four or more the possible number of Buddhists in Spain outlined above (in the FCBE estimations) if we want to accurately reflect these profiles of imprecise membership. We should take into account that the modern trend of concealing religious identity has perhaps had more of an impact among Buddhist sympathizers than other religious proposals, hence the need for FCBE and other coordinating committees in Spain to make Buddhism more visible. Moreover, it is a religion that has no stigma attached in Spain. Indeed, it could be said to have even a counter stigma, since there is a collective sympathy (or a fascination not far removed from what Francisco Javier or Cosme de Torres felt in the 16th century) that may determine a clear future direction in Spain, which would gradually lead to increased numerical support, social impact and visualization (Díez de Velasco 2009).

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the Fundación Pluralismo y Convivencia (Madrid) for permission to use some of the results of the research project “Budismo en España” in this chapter.

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NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO
SAMMA SAMBUDDHASSA

'Idam dukkham
ariyasaccanti me
bhikkhave pubbe
ananussutesu dhammesu
cakkhum udapādi
ñānam udapādi
paññā udapādi
vijjā udapādi
āloko udapādi'

DHAMMACAKKAPAVATTANA SUTTA
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