Robert J. Topmiller. *The Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Peace Movement in South Vietnam, 1964–1966.* Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006. xii + 214 pp. Paper. ISBN 9780813191669. $26.95.

The potent political and moral force of Vietnamese Buddhists was famously displayed to the world in 1963 when Thich Quang Duc famously immolated himself in protest of President Ngo Dinh Diem and his anti-Buddhist legislation in Saigon. Despite the iconic nature of the event, surprisingly little has been written to understand the role that Buddhism played during this tumultuous period. The most substantial is Jerrold Schecter's *The New Face of Buddha: Buddhism and Political Power in Southeast Asia*, published back in 1967. This dearth of literature is not surprising, given the overall lack of scholarship on Buddhism in Vietnam. *The Lotus Unleashed*, for this reason alone, is a welcome contribution. The fact that is a well written and fascinating account is a bonus.

The shortcoming of *The Lotus Unleashed* is that, like most books on Vietnam, particularly on the war, a disproportionate amount of attention is given to Americans and to the effect that it had on the United States. While Topmiller is ostensibly dealing with the Buddhist protests, the actual Buddhists themselves are only infrequently brought into the picture, while President Johnson, Ambassador Lodge and Generals Westmoreland and Walt are given a great deal of attention. There is some information given on the major Buddhist leaders: Thich Tri Quang, Thich Tam Chau and Thich Nhat Hanh. Readers are left with only the vaguest understanding of how these leaders interacted and how the events affected them. Almost totally absent was the voice of those who took part in the struggle for peace. The book would have been stronger if it had contained more on the Vietnamese in the Buddhist Peace Movement and less on the Americans reaction to it. Overall, the book seems to be concentrated more on the point that the uprising of 1966 provided an opportunity for American withdrawal that was, with devastating consequences, unheeded, and less on the Vietnamese themselves. In other words, *The Lotus Unleashed* comes across more as a book about America than a book about Vietnam, unfortunately following a longstanding American tradition.

Despite this serious drawback, *The Lotus Unleashed* remains a critical work for anyone who wishes to understand Vietnamese Buddhism in the contemporary context. Topmiller brings to light the historical background of conflict within the Unified Buddhist Church (UBC), without which it would not be possible to understand the present situation of Vietnamese Buddhists both in the diasporic setting as well as in Vietnam.

Topmiller does not discuss the long-term ramifications of UBC political activity until the second-to-last page, pointing out that the Communist government came down hard on the UBC after the defeat of the South Vietnamese regime. Leaders were jailed and the organisation was outlawed and replaced by a government controlled body. This final postscript is crucial for understanding why the Communist government has been so harsh in their treatment of the UBC. Given the UBC's long history in political activism, one can understand, if not completely sympathise, with the Communist actions. It also provides crucial information for understanding the outspoken criticism of the diasporic Vietnamese Buddhist community, supported by the American government. This criticism has mostly come under the guise of freedom of religion, though Topmiller's demonstration of the deep involvement of the UBC in actively overturning governments puts into question the extent to which it is religion rather than political threat that is being suppressed.

Topmiller also provides some insight into the causes behind the lack of cohesiveness between Vietnamese Buddhists overseas today, though this topic is not mentioned at all in *The Lotus Unleashed*. The variety of competing groups that we find today in Canada, the U.S. and other countries where the Vietnamese settled, and the often antagonistic nature of the relationships within these groups can be partially explained by the factions that developed within the UBC during the war. These can broadly be divided into three.

The first is the hard-core activists that followed Thich Tri Quang in Hue and felt that peace could only be obtained by toppling the pro-American regime, getting the Americans to leave Vietnam and starting earnest dialogue with the Communists. This earned Thich Tri Quang

the reputation for being agents of the Communists (although Topmiller, and history, has shown this to be incorrect).

The second group is what Topmiller refers to as the "moderates", led by Thich Tam Chau in Saigon. Thich Tam Chau was from the north and had earlier fled the Communists after 1954. He and his followers (also largely northerners) were therefore directly opposed to any discussion with the Communists, and supported both the Americans and any South Vietnamese regime that would fight the Communists. Thich Tam Chau's stance was fodder for rumours that he was an agent of the American Embassy. This is an opinion that I still hear today from some members of the overseas Vietnamese community.

The final faction has faired the best in some respects. Thich Nhat Hanh has managed to build a global organization that still keeps peacemaking as a central focus in their practice. Like Thich Tri Quang, Thich Nhat Hanh favoured peaceful negotiations, however, he was not as politically active as Thich Tri Quang. He and his followers instead focused their attention on ameliorating the effect on the displaced victims of the war in Vietnam. After he left Vietnam, he focused his efforts on trying to make the United States realize that the Vietnamese would be better off without them and their war. Consequently, he escaped a great deal of the blame that other factions directed (and still direct) at each other. However, his recent trips to Vietnam have started a new round of recriminations, and some are accusing him of assisting the Communist government by disguising the religious repression the government is undertaking.

Thus, *The Lotus Unleashed* provides crucial background information for understanding contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism. Although this is not the intention of the book, for scholars of Buddhism, this is its main contribution, and its significance cannot be understated. *The Lotus Unleashed* is a concise and insightful study of the impact that Buddhist activism had on the political situation during the 1960s in Vietnam. However, Topmiller is primarily an historian interested in the effects of Buddhists on politics. While there are occasions when the Buddhists themselves are revealed, mostly they are treated as a collective political force. *The Lotus Unleashed* would have been stronger if

Topmiller also discussed how political activism affected Buddhism in Vietnam, resulting in a book that is relevant for understanding contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism. The effects that the politicization of Buddhism had on the Buddhists in South Vietnam are still being felt in diasporic communities around the world, where the factions of the sixties remain divisive today.

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Bramadat, Paul and David Seljak, ed. *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*. Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2005. 320 pp. Paper. ISBN 9780321248411. $49.95.

The editors of *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*, Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, explain that the purpose of their book is to elucidate the relationships that exist between religion, ethnicity, and Canadian society among Canada's six largest minority religious groups, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, the Chinese, Jews, and Muslims. Due to the multiplicity of ways in which such a program can be carried out, and the ambiguity of the terms religion, ethnicity, and even to some extent, Canadian society, the editors choose to further delimit the purview of their book. Bramadat and Seljak appear to settle on two separate, yet related, purposes for the text. The first purpose is an analysis of how members of the above mentioned religious groups negotiate their religious and ethnic identities in Canadian society, contained in the first section of the book. The second purpose is an examination of the ways in which these religious communities have been affected by, and in turn have influenced Canadian society, found in the second part of the book.

Under this still rather broad trajectory, Bramadat and Seljak make the central claim in both the introduction and conclusion of the text that it is imperative that matters of religion and ethnicity be consciously included in Canadian public policy-making if Canada is to progress towards a truly pluralistic and inclusive society. The three chapters on