



Asian Studies Centre,
St Antony's College, University of Oxford
The Southeast Asia Seminar



A Look at the Forest: Universal Characteristics of the Buddhist-Rohingya Conflict



Brian Victoria

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5.30 p.m., Saturday 27th January,
Nissan Lecture Theatre,
St Antony's College

The 1997 publication of *Zen at War* sent shockwaves through Western adherents of Buddhism because it revealed allegedly enlightened Buddhist leaders had been fervent, even fanatical, supporters of Japanese militarism during WW II. Yet, Buddhists not affiliated with either the Zen sect, nor Japanese Buddhism, could take comfort in regarding this support as a “Zen thing” or “Japanese thing”, or even a “Mahāyāna thing”. In following years, however, it became clear that the Sri Lankan army enjoyed the strong support of Sinhalese Buddhist leaders during that country’s long civil war with indigenous Tamils. And today, we see a similar, if not more horrendous, scenario playing out between Buddhists and Rohingya in Myanmar. In short, the question of Buddhism and violence can no longer be attributed to one or another sect of Buddhism, or either the Theravāda or Mahāyāna schools. It must now be recognized as the pan-Buddhist phenomenon it is. So, what’s going on?

This lecture will address the question though not in the manner many might expect. Namely, it will not focus on Buddhism’s “violence-enabling mechanisms” (though there are many) but will take a step further back and ask why Buddhism is not essentially any different in its “sacralization” of violence, i.e. fighting “holy wars”, from the world’s other major faiths. Thus, the deeper question this lecture seeks to address is, using Buddhist-related violence as a starting point, why *all* major religions, at one time or another, have participated in allegedly holy wars. This is the meaning of taking “a look at the forest”, not just the individual trees (examples) of Buddhist violence. You are cordially invited to participate in this “walk through the forest”.

The lecturer, Dr **Brian Victoria**, is a fellow of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies and author of *Zen at War* and many other books and articles concerning Buddhism and violence. At present, he is completing a book on (Zen)Buddhist-related terrorism in 1930s Japan. Brian is a fully-ordained priest in the Sōtō Zen sect of Japanese Buddhism and currently lives and conducts research in Kyoto, Japan.

All are welcome

Convenor: Dr M Walton. Enquiries: asian@sant.ox.ac.uk or 01865-274559

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